Herford, Age of Wordsworth
Greenough & Kittredge, Words
and their Ways
Schofield
Root, Chaucer
Kittredge, Chaucer

Chas. B. Goulding
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THE KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH

BY

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PREFACE

A SINGLE but ample purpose has determined the choice of the materials that have gone to the making of this book. This purpose has been to indicate a manner of reducing to some kind of intelligible order the tangle of opinion and of unconscious habit which is present in the minds of English speaking persons in the practical command of their native idiom. The field under observation has been the use of the native idiom not merely in writing but also in speech, and not merely at painful moments of indecision, but also when no hesitations attend the words and phrases of tongue and of pen.

That this purpose is ample appears even from so brief a statement. Perhaps it is a purpose too ample for adequate realization. Such a realization would imply a complete psychology of the English language, a task which a bold professional psychologist might well hesitate to undertake, and one certainly which does not appeal to the student of language either as practicable or eminently useful. A danger of formal elaboration, especially in so complicated a matter as language, lies in the temptation to subdue concrete detail to the demands of beauty and order in the system. For the present purpose, it has seemed advisable to approach the subject not as a system, but from several different directions, each more or less independent, but each also leading to a general understanding of the subject which will result in the end, one may hope, in making clear at least a reasonable attitude of mind towards the many and variegated problems presented by the English language in its practical applications. A final solution of all difficulties is hopeless, but a sensible apprehension of each new problem as it challenges attention is not an impos-

sibility. The method employed entails a certain amount of repetition, but repetition is not altogether without its compensations.

That the subject of this book is as important as its inclusiveness calls for no extended demonstration. Our English speech is not only our most constant companion, but likewise the mental activity upon which, from childhood to maturity, we speculate most abundantly. Ever since the beginnings of general education in this country, speech has been a matter of public concern, and it has been made the foundation for training in the kind of civilization we have been trying to realize. What has been the drift of this training? Why do we devote so much time to English, and what light do our endeavors in this direction throw upon the whole course and intent of our aspirations? Have we an intelligible program back of our activities in speech, or are we following blind impulses? These are but a few of the many far-reaching questions that may be asked. And of course our interest in English is not limited merely to the spoken word. From the beginning of the modern era, the culture of the world has been becoming more and more a literary culture. Ours might well be called a pen and paper civilization. In all this there is much that is admirable. It has provided the world with a new form of expression. Everybody reads nowadays, and almost everybody writes, or tries to write. The number of prospective shortstory writers in America today is probably larger than the number of prospective politicians. The students who would have aspired to be orators a generation or two ago, now study composition. Writing is no longer the distinction of a limited professional class, it is one of the universal forms of expression. In business, in social intercourse, in all callings, the ability to use the written forms of the language adequately has become an elementary necessity. Modern life cannot be limited to those close contacts which called for no communication beyond the spoken word. We must now have long-distance communication, less intimate and personal than the spoken word,

but gaining by way of compensation in permanency and in extent of appeal, and above all in an increase of critical self-consciousness on the part of the users of the language. Nobody can write what he has to say without knowing himself better as a consequence of this endeavor. It is infinitely easier to deceive oneself in speech than it is in writing, infinitely easier to get along with half-spoken utterances than with half-formulated written expression.

The purpose of this book being to call attention specially to underlying principles, this purpose necessarily implies certain exclusions. The book is not a pronunciation guide, a rhetoric or a handbook of composition. It does not attempt to enforce a particular style of writing or of speaking. It is not concerned with the technical rules of punctuation, paragraphing, sentence structure, and the other minutiæ of rhetorical instruction. That these technical details are important goes without saying. At the very moment of speaking and writing, the particular technical device to be employed is of the utmost importance. One chooses one's tools for their appropriateness to the work in hand. Yet the choice always implies something antecedent to the handling of the tool, and it is mainly with these antecedent choices that this book is concerned. A fair case might even be made for the position that clearness of mind in choosing the direction of one's endeavors is more important than the specific methods to be employed in expressing what one has to say. The person who knows clearly what he wants to say and why he wants to say it will not often be greatly troubled by the difficulties of the forms of language. He will certainly be in a more promising way to express himself adequately than the speaker or writer who conceives that effective use of the language lies in the application of rules of composition mechanically acquired. For after all, language is never merely a tool, never merely a mechanical implement which does its work exactly in the same way for one person as for another, but always it is besides a part of the living personality of the one who uses it.

If this book is not a rhetoric, neither is it a dictionary. It would have been easy to load the pages of the book with an infinity of illustrative examples. In this respect it has seemed that moderation was desirable in order not to distract attention too much from the real purpose of the book, which has been, if the repetition be permitted, to call attention to general principles rather than to make exhaustive collections of specific instances. Sufficient examples have been cited to make the points clear, but any reader who has got the points will have no difficulty in adding abundantly to the number of the illustrations. And perhaps the author may be permitted in this connection to call attention to another work of his, *A Comprehensive Guide to Good English* (Rand McNally and Company), in which some thousands of examples of debatable English speech have been assembled. Any student may profitably make similar collections of his own, for it is by just such accumulations of detail that the knowledge of English best prospers and grows.

Still another aspect of the English language is treated only in outline in this volume, but again not because of its unimportance. This is the kind of study which has to do with the historical development of the language. The English language, as one regards this term in all its implications, is seen not to be merely a useful invention, devised for the satisfaction of immediate needs and desires, or even for the realization of disinterested and lofty literary aspirations. It is that, and as we shall continually insist, the English language of today is most importantly that. But the English language is something more than a handmaiden to make profitable, or instructive, or pleasing, the immediate concerns of present life. It is besides, one may say, a monument of civilization. The English language has a past as well as a present. Here again it must be said that the past of the English language does not fundamentally concern the unreflecting person — or for that matter any person — in acquiring a practical knowledge of English. Certainly it does not directly concern any person at the very moment of the urgent use of language.

Like the knowledge of the foundation principles of mental habit that underlie the effective use of the language, the knowledge of the past of the language is supplemental to that direct kind of knowledge which attends immediate experience.

Though it is supplemental to direct experience, the knowledge of the past of the language is by no means unimportant for the critical student. The bearing of tendencies in present English is often made more evident by an examination of the developments that have taken place during the earlier stages of the language. Things seen in perspective often take on different and more intelligible appearances than when they are viewed only close at hand. A knowledge of the historical forms of the language will therefore often be found to have a value in comprehending the significance of the practical applications of English in the present. Even if it had no such value, however, the critical student would not be deterred from examining the past of the English language. Matters of knowledge may have an interest in themselves and apart from their practical applications. It is certainly no unreasonable expectation to suppose that a lover of English speech should want to know as much about the language as he can, not only the language into which he is born and in which he has his being, but he will also want to know what the nature of this language was in the days of his near and even of his more remote ancestors. When one goes into them in detail, however, these historical matters call for a special treatment, for a different method and emphasis from those employed in the present volume. They must be left, therefore, merely with an indication of their extent and character, and with a recommendation that they be not neglected. Attention is called to the reading lists at the end of the volume, where those inexperienced in the historical details of the language will find the titles of books that should prove helpful in carrying forward the study of this important branch of the knowledge of English.

Certain chapters in the latter part of the book are concerned with some of the more significant problems of contemporary style.

The discussion of style is commonly considered to be one of the branches of rhetoric. Yet rhetoric itself is merely a branch of the general study of the language. No rhetorical effect can be produced without the use of language, and the study of style on its formal side is nothing more than the examination of those devices and manipulations of language which are employed to attain the desired end in the art of expression. It is important therefore that the relations of style to the whole body of habits and associations of which the language is composed should be clearly realized, and the chapters on style in this book have been included for the purpose of calling attention to the fact that style is not a thing apart, but as essential and as implicit as any other aspect of speech in the knowledge of English.

The reading lists at the end of the volume will provide materials for further study in a variety of directions. They have also served the purpose of freeing the text from a multiplicity of bibliographical references. These lists will indicate in some degree the dependencies of this book upon other writings and the differences between the opinions expressed in it and those that have been held by others.

In slightly different forms, the chapters entitled A Touchstone for English, The Plea of Poetic License and Writing as a Fine Art have already appeared in print, the first in *The American Mercury*, the two others in *The Forum*. Acknowledgment is made to the editors of these magazines for their courteous permission to use this material.

G. P. K.

CONTENTS

I.	Nature and Nurture	3
II.	English Today	15
III.	English Dialects	22
IV.	The Golden Age of the English Language	29
V.	A Touchstone for English	40
VI.	The Levels of English Speech	55
VII.	The Drift Toward Regularity	77
VIII.	Correctness	106
IX.	Analogy	115
X.	Etymology	130
XI.	Logic	147
XII.	Authority	158
XIII.	The Morals of Good English	171
XIV.	The Purist Attitude	186
XV.	The Historical Study of English	218
XVI.	What Is Grammar?	228
XVII.	The Language and the People	252
XVIII.	Structural Changes	265
XIX.	The Causes of Structural Change	277
XX.	The English Vocabulary	313
XXI.	English Sounds	341
XXII.	The Best Pronunciation	369
XXIII.	The Relationships of English	388
XXIV.	Language and Style	418

XXV. Mood and Aim 433
XXVI. Diction 447
XXVII. Rhythm, Melody, and Tone . . . 479
XXVIII. The Plea of Poetic License . . . 500
XXIX. Writing as a Fine Art 515
XXX. The Future of English 531

Reading Lists 555

Index 565

THE KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH

I

NATURE AND NURTURE

"Why should I study English?" objected a rebellious youth, "I know English. I am English."

But not everyone who is English really knows English, nor is knowing all of the same kind. A professional ball player may know how to pitch a curve. A physicist may know the same thing, but he will know it in quite a different way. His way of knowing will be better, for though he may not be able to pitch a curve as well, yet other things being equal, if he spent as much time in practice as the professional player, in all likelihood he could pitch a better curve. In other words, analytic knowledge is an aid and support to experimental knowledge.

Such at least is the conviction with which this book on the English language has been written. In the courtly debates of other days it was a common subject for disputation whether man derived more from birth or from training, from nature or from nurture. The youth who has just been quoted evidently assumed that his English came to him as a perfect gift of nature. But of course no one is born in possession of the English language, or of any other language. Every normal person is born with the necessary organs, lungs, vocal chords, tongue, lips, and prospectively teeth, which make the acquisition of language possible. Language itself, however, is not a natural gift, but even in its rudimentary forms it is an acquired accomplishment. Without training and

discipline, no one would ever achieve a language, just as, without training, no one could acquire the skill to play on the violin. One may have the best natural equipment in the world for playing the violin, but without discipline in the technical art of playing the violin, whether self-applied or imposed, all this natural gift will not make a violinist.

And yet, though language is not simply a gift of nature, neither is it on the other hand altogether an acquired technical art, certainly not altogether the result of discipline and training consciously applied. There is a great difference between the method by which one acquires a knowledge of a language and the method by which one acquires a knowledge of the skill required to play the violin. It does not even follow that a conscious or theoretical knowledge of the language is a necessary precedent to a fairly high degree of practical command of good English. The power to use the language grows as an accompaniment of the experiences of living, and any person who leads a normal life acquires in the process a not inconsiderable knowledge of the language. The professional ball pitcher, of whom we have spoken, and the unanalytic author, of whom there have been many, both prove that critical discipline is not indispensable as a creative force. In fact, so far at least as language is concerned, it is quite the other way round. It is impossible to have an analytic and theoretical knowledge of good English without first having a realization of the thing itself. The experience of good English must come before the analysis of it. How is it possible to know that any English is good until it has satisfied that first and final demand of all good English, the demand of meeting

adequately the linguistic situation in which it occurs? Good English cannot be known merely by definition, it must be known also by experience. English which satisfies a notion of what English ought to be but does not satisfy the vital linguistic moment in which it actively appears, certainly cannot be called good. Theoretically correct English is not necessarily good English — it may indeed be very bad English. On the other hand, can that English be called good which satisfies the needs of the practical linguistic moment but does not satisfy the critic's notion of what good English ought to be? Can English be theoretically incorrect and still be good?

These are manifestly debatable questions and they will be discussed at further length in later chapters of this book. The point of view of the book may be stated here at the start, however, and the assertion made that the only sound test of the goodness of a linguistic action is to be found within the action itself. To judge a form of speech not by what it has done, but by what some other form of speech might have done, is like taking one set of laws and applying them to conditions with which they have nothing to do.

If one cannot be aware of good English until after the event, then it is manifestly too late, so far as any specific linguistic act is concerned, to worry whether the English is good or bad. And if this is so, the question naturally arises, why trouble at all to know English analytically and critically? Was he not right then, the rebellious youth mentioned at the opening of this chapter? Why not simply forge ahead, speaking and writing from the heart out, doing the work of each moment as the moment

calls for it, and never troubling about past errors except to efface them by new efforts that are not errors?

Whether or not one regards this as a proper attitude of mind, it is in reality the attitude which everybody for the most part instinctively assumes in the simpler activities of speech. The occasions when one stops to consider are few in number. The situations in which doubt and uncertainty arise as to a proper form of language to use are relatively infrequent. Much the larger part of every person's use of language comes in response to instinctive habit. This is, one may say, the natural and normal life of language. It is like good health in the bodily existence. Good health is the rule, and sickness the exception. So in language, the unimpeded flow of speech, the perfect marriage of language and occasion, this is normal and healthy. Hesitation and uncertainty between two or more possible choices in speech is a kind of disease in language. It afflicts some people more than others. Those who always see things in simple and concrete aspects rarely know these doubts. It has been said of a famous orator, more famous for his eloquence than for his subtle reasoning, that he never paused for a word in his life. The reflective and philosophical, on the other hand, are sometimes so beset by hesitations that they practically lose the power of speech.

It does not follow, however, that occasions requiring an act of critical judgment in speech are unimportant because they are relatively infrequent. Sickness is less general than health, but to the one suffering, his sickness is of the greatest importance. He wants to know in what way he is sick and how he can become well. Likewise in language, the speaker or writer who suddenly

finds his forward progress obstructed by some unsolved difficulty of structure, pronunciation, syntax, or vocabulary, cannot go on his way rejoicing until he knows how to remove his difficulty. He must feel the full satisfaction of knowledge before he can be restored to the happy state of confidence which alone can give him assurance that his use of speech is adequate. Nor does this simile of sickness and health exhaust the interests of the critical attitude in speech. One may be concerned not merely with removing obstructions to healthy action, but with the endeavor to discover new paths, to bring something into existence in the use of language which had not existed before. If one wanted to carry on the simile of sickness and health, one might say that the genuine critical student is interested not only in the therapeutics but also in the eugenics of language.

But the question still recurs, if it is possible to speak well and to write well without a critical knowledge of the language, why should anyone bother about the critical side of the language at all? The answer to this question is, that things which are possible are not always expedient. There is no telling how much more easily and effectively the person without critical knowledge who speaks and writes well might have acquired his command over language if he had been able to direct his own growth by a competent self-analysis. And certainly it is not the wisest method to turn the inexperienced adrift with the hope that they may blunder along and in the end learn by their own mistakes what good English is. This is too costly a procedure. For the one who might come safely through, hundreds would fall by the wayside. The better plan is to provide some kind of intelligent direction

for those seeking guidance, not in order to save them from exerting themselves, but to show them where and how best to expend their energies.

There is then a certain body of knowledge with respect to the English language of which serious students of the language may reasonably be expected to be aware, and concerning which they may be expected to have intelligent opinions. Intelligent opinion is one that answers on first-hand information both the question what is right or important and the question why it is right or important. The blind follower of authority, no matter how lofty or numerous his authorities, can never be an intelligent person. He may be a learned person, but to be intelligent he must follow his own and not somebody else's judgment — always supposing of course that he has acquired the foundation of information which is necessary to support a judgment. Sound information is an inescapable prerequisite for sound judgment, and an adequate knowledge of the English language implies a knowledge both of the background and of the immediate life of English speech.

Especially is it incumbent upon persons who undertake to impose upon themselves or others any kind of formal discipline in the language to know the grounds upon which their pronouncements are based. Even though they mean well, if they do not know well, such persons must be counted among the evil doers. The greatest obstacle to the dissemination of the knowledge of good English is the bland evasion of all independent criticism of speech by obedient adherents to authority. In spite of their comfortable assurance of virtue, they are of those who vainly attempt to pass on the torch of knowledge

without themselves adding any fuel to keep the flame burning. His own heart's blood must enter into every man's knowledge of good English. To be merely a conserver and transmitter of a tradition of good English is therefore impossible. English is good only when it experiences a new birth and a new life, when it becomes genuinely a part of the person who uses it.

All the interest of speech, moreover, is not consumed in the practical activities of communication by means of the voice in speaking or by means of the pen in writing. One may wish to know the English language from a disinterested love of truth, from mere love of knowledge. No human activity is more remarkable, more constantly and universally with us than speech. No man can know himself without knowing his speech. One who has honestly analyzed the elements of his speech has at the same time gone a long way in analyzing the elements of his character and of the character of the society in which he lives. To know the English language is therefore by no means an ignoble desire on the part of those who express their lives in the forms of English speech.

These then are the two benefits which this book seeks to impart, an increase of knowledge and an increase of effectiveness in the use of the English language. The two purposes move side by side, and as one succeeds, the other will succeed. The awareness of good English will serve as a guide and support to the practical habits of the hand as it writes and of the tongue as it speaks. Thus critical intelligence and active skill should become helpful complements to each other, and the person who finds this intelligence and this skill in his own experience fruitfully combined, the person in whom nurture assists nature,

may hope that at least he is started on the way to true knowledge of good English.

This familiar phrase, a knowledge of English, is manifestly one of very flexible meaning. In many States of the United States a knowledge of English is required before one can become a voter. Knowledge of this sort is variously interpreted as the ability to read the Constitution, to sign one's name, to write ten consecutive words in English from memory, or in other such simple ways. Advertisements for help, for cooks, for clerks, for gardeners, often likewise specify that a knowledge of English is required. From one point of view this is not an arduous requirement, usually implying nothing more than the ability to get along in an occupation with masters, mistresses, and with other associates who speak no language but English. At the other extreme from this minimum of accomplishment may stand the expert speaker, writer, or scholar, whose knowledge of English covers an infinity of detail beyond the experience of those who are making their first crude beginnings in the use of the language. But does even the most expert person know all there is to be known about English? Can nurture put him in absolute command of all the possibilities of the language? Certainly no person of experience ever cherished such a foolish conviction. As knowledge grows, the realization of new directions of effort also grows. There is always something for every person to learn, some new skill, some new adaptation to the unlimited opportunities for expression in the language.

Though this phrase a knowledge of English must always take its color from the circumstances in which it is used, meaning one thing as applied to the novice and a very

different thing as applied to the expert, there are nevertheless two general ways applicable to all in which the notion of the knowledge of English may be regarded. These correspond to what may be designated roughly as the unreflecting and the reflecting attitude of mind. The unreflecting use of English implies of course a certain kind of knowledge of the language, the kind necessary, for example, in carrying on the affairs of daily living. This is in fact the kind of knowledge for which every person finds the most frequent use. We all of us need English to buy street-car tickets, to conduct business, and to communicate with the thousand and one persons with whom we come into casual contact. Most persons go through their lives with no very keen realization of the possibility of any other kind of knowledge than this. It is indeed the most fundamental, but also the simplest kind of knowledge, and it has as its obvious justification that practical usefulness of language in attaining the ends for which it is devised which must be the reason for existence of all language. This kind of knowledge we have called unreflecting, because at the moment of employing such forms of speech, or even before or after one has employed them, the mind is not busied with reflections on the forms of language. When one buys a street-car ticket, the words necessary for this transaction seem to come of themselves, almost as a gift of nature. One may be reflecting about the content of the communication, the cost of the ticket, whether it calls for a transfer, or about other similar things, but such reflections have nothing to do with the occasion regarded as a linguistic moment. In fact when a purchaser asks for a street-car ticket, he is almost unaware of having used language. So close

is the harmony between the thought and its expression that the two are felt to be one.

All this seems very obvious, and these remarks about the simple, unreflecting uses of language have been made mainly for the purpose of calling attention to the contrasting, that is, to the reflecting uses of language. Buying a street-car ticket is a very different thing as a language activity from writing a poem. It is inconceivable that a poet should write a poem without first planning and arranging for it, not merely with respect to his subject, but also with respect to meter, words, and general tone. The poet indeed is likely to reflect on the language of his poem not only before he writes but also during the process of writing and afterward. And what the poet does, every person does who looks at language with the eyes of an artist. The artist will often make changes in what he has written or spoken, and even in the end may be uncertain whether or not he has expressed his intention just as he should have done. On the other hand, it is possible that very long and assiduous practice in the writing of poetry may enable the poet to write almost as instinctively and as unreflectingly as one speaks when buying a street-car ticket. While his poem is being written, the poet's mind may seem to be operating in a single direction, and after it is finished the poem may seem to him and to others something so inevitable in expression that the question of expression is never raised. Again the harmony between the thought and its expression will be so close that the two seem to be one. When this degree of skill and unconsciousness is attained, if it ever is attained, in the art of writing poetry, obviously it must have come only as the result of a long preceding discipline in the technical re-

quirements of this art. The poet may have forgotten his days of hesitation and experiment, but only by having passed through the reflective stages of poetic experience could he attain the mature unreflecting mastery of his art.

But the important question now arises whether this experience of the poet as here described by way of illustration of the artist's use of language is not after all essentially the same as the experience of a person buying a street-car ticket, differing not in kind but only in degree. Ordinarily when one buys a street-car ticket one does not reflect at all on the forms of language to be used. Ordinarily when one writes a poem, when one uses language for any purposes which are not matters of simple routine, one does reflect more or less, though by long discipline and experience one may be able to perform even these language activities with what seems like an immediate response, dependent not at all on deliberation or prearrangement. Yet on the other hand, how easily may even so simple a thing as buying a street-car ticket call for choice in phrasing, for some reflection on the forms of language. Everyone makes, or in the past has made, a choice in a great variety of possible phrases, ranging from the hoodlum's "Gimme a ticket" through the blunt "I want a ticket," to those forms of expression in which one buys a ticket with distinction and elegance. In short the point which this discussion has endeavored to enforce is that no expression in language is merely a necessary counterpart to an experience in the world, an inevitable accompaniment which together with the experience constitutes an identity and a unity. Language is always a creation, always a work of art. It may only seem natural at times, when long experience and repetition have developed certain linguistic

activities into instinctive habits. Some of these habits indeed may have been acquired only through painful reflection. All of them at any moment, through a change of circumstances, are likely to pass out of the class of instinctive habits and to revert to those original conditions of all language which require some constructive skill in adapting language to its purposes before a completely adequate and satisfying result can be secured.

In this chapter certain contrasting terms have been employed and discussed for the purpose of calling attention to a double character of language always present, in the simplest as well as in the most elaborate uses. We have spoken first of nature and nurture, and the antithesis indicated by these terms is also suggested by such opposites as analytic and experimental, conscious and unconscious, instinctive and deliberate, critical and uncritical, reflecting and unreflecting. One of these aspects of language does not replace the other as experience in language grows. Both are permanently and fundamentally inherent in all use of language, and it is for this reason that the discussion of them has been placed at the very beginning of this book as something implicit in all that may be said later.

II

ENGLISH TODAY

If one were asked what the English language today is, the easiest answer to the question would be to say that it is the language of the English-speaking peoples. This states at least an obvious fact. Whether a speaker lives in North America or South Africa, in Australia or Hawaii, in England, Scotland, or Ireland, if he speaks the prevailing cultivated language of the community in which he dwells, he will speak the English language and will be one of the innumerable hosts of the English-speaking peoples. He will call his language English, perhaps with some qualifying word added to indicate a shade of local or social adaptation, but English is the only generic term that applies to all the various manifestations of the common speech of the English peoples.

The English-speaking peoples thus comprehend more than a single race or a single nation. In the United States alone millions of foreigners from practically all the races of the world are now speaking English. From Asia have come Chinese and Japanese, from eastern Europe have come Russians, Turks, Armenians, Serbs, Greeks. From western Europe have come still greater numbers of Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, and Italians, and from Africa have come the negroes. But for the most part all these peoples have given up their alien tongues. Their children have not known the language their fathers and their remoter ancestors spoke. Every

day the miracle of Pentecost is repeated in our presence, for of these many nations "hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born." They have all become parts of the English-speaking peoples, made over into something new by one of the most powerful dissolving agents human society has ever known. This dissolving agent is the English language, and so far as language goes, and so far as the elements of the civilization of mankind may be determined by language, all the diverse racial and national characteristics of these many sources have been merged into the present unity of the English-speaking peoples.

When we thus emphasize the unity of the English-speaking peoples, however, the word "unity" immediately raises certain doubts and questions in our minds. It is true that the English language is the speech of all those persons whose native, or even whose acquired, tongue is English, dwellers in London or Chicago, in a village in Nebraska or a village in Yorkshire. But in what sense can we say that this language is a unity? Does the dweller in London speak and write like the native of Chicago? Or does the Nebraska villager speak like the Yorkshire villager? Or does even the Nebraska villager speak like every other person in the United States? Does the native of Chicago speak like the native of Boston? But the unity of the English-speaking peoples certainly does not imply an identity of speech among these peoples. If unity is there, as it surely is, it must be unity of a large and comprehensive kind.

Two persons who speak what by common consent we call the same language do not speak exactly alike, and often, from the critic's point of view, they do not speak

very much alike. This is a matter of frequent observation and experience. We are led thus immediately to the consideration of what is the most striking fact in the life of a language, the fact of ever present unity and of ever present divergence in speech. We speak of the various languages in use among men, French and German, English and Italian, and dozens of others besides these. Each is readily recognized to be a language in itself, and yet at the same time we are persuaded that no two Frenchmen or Germans, no two Englishmen or Italians, ever spoke exactly alike. Each language has its own unity, but in this unity there is infinite diversity. The problems which are raised by the contemplation of this unity and diversity may be summed up under the two general heads of dialects and standards, and it is to these problems that we shall first direct our attention. Dialect is the term which designates the movement towards differentiation in speech, and standards result from the opposite tendency towards uniformity and regularity.

What is a dialect? The question sounds simple, but the answer is not so easy. In a general way everybody thinks he knows what a dialect is. We have all heard dialects, and some of us know how to speak one. But cultivated persons are not ordinarily willing to admit that their own customary speech is a dialect. On the contrary they would probably be very much offended if a critic should insinuate as much. The fact is that in the common understanding of the word "dialect" the term conveys a contemptuous or reprehensible shade of meaning. Nobody who thinks much about language at all thinks of himself as habitually speaking or writing a dialect. Literature is sometimes written in dialect, but

dialect literature is almost always humorous literature, accepted and enjoyed with an apologetic smile. Lowell's standing as a poet had not been determined by the *Biglow Papers*, or Tennyson's by his dialect poems, and though many distinguished authors have written in dialect, no writer esteemed of the first rank has used dialect in any except his lighter moments. Even Burns is far from being exclusively a dialect poet. The first impulse, therefore, would be to describe dialect as some exceptional or inferior form of speech. On the other hand, the speech taken as the norm and as the approved type of the language is dignified with the name of "the language," as though there were only one standard, one set of reputable regularized habits in the language, these habits being the ones that reflect the essential and true nature of the language.

The adverse implications of the popular use of the term "dialect" are apparent when one considers local and class dialects. A local dialect is usually the speech of some up-country or backwoods region, regarded with superior amusement by the dweller in the more highly refined city. But, of course, even a city dialect, even the speech of a great city, may be a local dialect from some points of view. Perhaps some natives of Boston might look upon the speech of Chicago as a local dialect. But if one should set out to find that central home of the English speech which determines all variations from it as local dialects, where should one expect to discover it? Certainly no city, no community of the United States can be said to be the supreme locality in which the English language in a pure and unadulterated form is spoken. In the old days when kings and kings' courts existed, the

language of the court was often accepted as the most highly approved local speech, and the speech of all other localities was rated accordingly. But we have no king and we have no court, and the superiority of the customs of one community over those of another are now largely matters of private and personal opinion. This does not prevent these opinions from being held with great fervor and tenacity, however, and one of the easiest ways of offending somebody else's sense of good taste is by the use of what is regarded as provincial and uncouth speech.

Class dialects are still more numerous and difficult of control than local dialects. The most comprehensive class distinction in speech is that between educated and uneducated speech. The speech of the educated person is supposed not to be a dialect, but the speech of the uneducated person is a dialect. Obviously, however, this distinction raises many difficult questions. Who are educated persons? And is education an absolute or a relative state of being? And may a person who speaks an approved form of the English language still be an uneducated person? Can a narrow-minded, uninteresting, and ignorant person nevertheless speak what will ordinarily pass as good English? And may an intelligent, quick-minded, and within his own field of activity, a well-informed person, nevertheless speak what will ordinarily be condemned as bad English? Obviously it will not do to make the possession of a correct English the final test of education. A carpenter who breaks the rules of grammar right and left may be by all reasonable standards much more highly educated than a social parasite who uses the language with utmost propriety. But, of course, the carpenter we have supposed would not be highly

educated in the social conventions of language. The point to be observed here is that expertness in language does not imply expertness in any other direction, and the other way round. Just as one may be an admirable mathematician without being much else, so one may use formally excellent English without making very interesting or important use of it.

Other kinds of class dialects are those which arise in particular trades or occupations, or which result from the mixture of English with other language traditions. Mixed dialects occur very frequently in communities with large foreign populations. Thus in America a German English, an Italian English, a Yiddish English, an Irish English, and various other combinations have developed. Dialects of this kind are usually so far removed from the approved forms of speech that they do not enter into competition with them. The person who speaks German English or Italian English is the kind of speaker who is said to "talk with an accent." From the point of view of the cultivated speech his language is so crude as to put him almost beyond the circle of the English-speaking peoples.

These are some of the aspects of the popular attitude towards dialect. In this view dialects are amusing, primitive, or decadent stages of the language. They are characterized either by a rustic simplicity or by an urban vulgarity which makes them something to be outgrown if one happens to be born into them. Regarded as a definition, however, this popular notion of dialects is defective in that it always raises matters of opinion concerning which there is likely to be little agreement. Details of speech which appeal to one person as belonging to a rustic

dialect may seem to another person normal and properly to be regarded as standard. When a Southerner says "I reckon," or "I was right much put out by what you said," this may sound dialectal to a speaker from another region. But likely as not the Southerner will have the courage of his traditions and will continue saying "I reckon," and "right much," even after his attention has been called to the fact that speakers from other regions regard these uses as dialectal. If this hypothetical Southerner is satisfied with his speech, and no one can deny him this pleasure, to him it can scarcely seem dialectal.

If every person who speaks English were content to look upon one particular form of English as the only permissible norm, then all variants from this norm might be called dialects. But no such agreement exists, ever has existed, and probably it never will exist. In all use of speech a very great difference of practice prevails. In their approvals and in their condemnations, speakers apply not one, but many standards. Each individual's attempt to discover just what standards he will apply to determine his own practice is an important and a justifiable attempt. But, for the moment, it may be helpful to look at the English language apart from questions of approval and disapproval in order to see what this kind of contemplation of the subject yields concerning English dialects. The next chapter will examine English dialects not from the point of view of their practical usefulness or of the personal associations that gather about them, but in the light of their nature and origin.

III

ENGLISH DIALECTS

Dialects in at least one respect are like apples. An apple is a known kind of fruit, but no single apple sums up in itself all the essential and necessary characteristics of the genus apple. There exists no absolute apple, but only individual apples of varying taste, color, and texture. So also the dialects of a language are the only aspects of it which have any real existence. There is no absolute English, but only many varying modifications of a speech which we agree to think of as a single speech, because with all their differences, the forms of English speech are also much alike.

In the popular understanding of the term, as has already been pointed out, a derogatory sense attaches to the word "dialect." The speech of a locality or of a particular level of society is classed as a dialect by contrast with a more highly esteemed cosmopolitan or cultivated speech. The difference between the two, however, from the point of view of the nature of dialects, is merely that one is an approved and the other a contemned or less highly approved variation of the language. To be sure, this difference is not unimportant, especially in the immediate practical use of the language. But neither the popular dialect nor the cultivated standard dialect represents the absolute and essential speech. Each belongs to the language, and the history of English has shown often

enough that it is easy for these two forms of speech to change places.

He would be a rash person who should attempt to say how many dialects there are in the English language. The first preliminary to answering this question would be to define the term "dialect," but by the time a definition had been reached, it would have become apparent that no answer to the question was possible. One would be led in the end to ask whether the English of any two persons who speak and write the English language is exactly the same. But obviously it is not. Even two members of the same family will not be exactly alike in their use of speech. They could be exactly alike only if they were exactly alike in physical and mental structure and were subject to exactly the same impulses — a plain impossibility.

Now the ordinary implication of the term "dialect" is that the speech of the persons who are included under the term is alike. But since the speech of no two persons can be alike, it follows that there must always be an area of negligible variation whenever one puts the speech of several persons under one generalization. And no matter how small the grouping, there must always remain this area of negligible variation. The two members of the same family speak alike only when one consents to overlook the differences between them. So any dialect that is established must be established on the basis of those similarities in speech which one elects to keep before the mind in order to make possible a generalization, the differences for the moment being held in the background of the neglected area of variation.

Although no two persons speak exactly alike, neverthe-

less any two persons who speak the English language have similarities of speech sufficient to justify holding them together as speaking the same dialect. This amounts merely to saying that the English language is the speech of all those persons in the English world who speak recognizably the same language. The ungrammatical person who says *ain't* and *He done it*, and who speaks of *them boards*, from this largest and most inclusive point of view, speaks the same dialect as the most precise stickler for grammatical propriety. They both speak English — even the most ungrammatical person's English is English. To include the two within the same dialect calls for some stretching of the area of negligible variation, but the term "English" must be wide enough to include all those who speak what is recognized to be English.

These remarks have prepared the way for the axiom that the degree of similarity or unity in the speech of several persons, that is, the degree of homogeneity in a dialect, varies inversely to the area of speech brought under observation. The greatest degree of similarity is to be found in the most closely united and smallest social group — say in the family. The speech of the various members of the family will not only be alike in more details than the speech of any mixed group, but the family will also possess certain habits of speech, names of foods, names of household articles, manners of addressing each other, which give to the family its peculiar sense of unity and intimacy. These habits of speech are the family dialect.

But enlarging now the limits of inclusion so as to take in the habits of speech common not merely to a family but to a town, we arrive at a new unity which has been

attained by excluding the distinctive uses which give to the smaller groups, the families, their peculiar unity. The unity of the town includes a larger circle of speakers, but the circle remains unbroken only by stretching it to bring it outside and beyond the familiar and intimate unity of any one of the smaller circles.

Extending the large circle of inclusion still farther, one may establish a grouping of similars in speech habits which will include many towns, will include all the speakers of a country. The English language is the speech even of different countries. Every extension of the limits of inclusion, however, geographically and numerically, carries with it a limitation of the number of speech habits which the members of the groups have in common. If one will maintain a sense of unity, the area of negligible variation must grow with the growth of the area of inclusiveness.

English considered as a national dialect or idiom is a notion arrived at by grouping those features of speech which the members of the nation as a whole possess in common, or which they are agreed to think they possess in common. Thus the citizens of the nation through this idiom acquire a means for expressing a feeling for national unity, for a race. But how vastly greater is the area of negligible variation in arriving at the feeling for a national or race unity as compared with the feeling for a family unity! The two dialects are machines of very different powers and possibilities. The machinery may be of slight grasp, but capable of exquisite workmanship; or its grasp may reach to the limits of inclusiveness of the speech, and then its powers will be wide rather than deep.

A dialect may be defined, therefore, as a group of similars in language conveniently held together as a unity by

the process of disregarding the dissimilar elements also present in the speech of the persons for the moment under observation. The dialect as a generalization thus exists only in the mind of the person who makes the generalization, though the details which he collects and unites into a generalization exist among the realities of the speech which he observes.

Despite the fact that no two persons speak or write exactly alike and that there must always remain an area of variation, a kind of twilight zone of unintelligibility, between them, experience shows us that practically satisfactory communication by means of language is nevertheless possible. It is made so by the further fact that intelligibility or understanding in speech always comes from within, not from without. It is a creation, not an imposition. To be sure, the words of the language that one reads or hears give the clue to the kind of creative act of understanding which the hearer or reader of the words will perform, but these words cannot compel infallibly any particular understanding. How often it happens that two persons will interpret what seems like perfectly plain English in quite different ways! Words do not have mathematically precise values. They have only suggestive values, and they give hints, rather than absolute demonstrations of meaning.

In the affairs of daily living, to dwell on this thought of the unintelligibility of language too long or too often would be disenchanting. The result to which reflection would lead one might well be that since language is the chief means of communication between human beings, and since language is such an imperfect medium of communication, it thus becomes impossible for any human

being ever to know or to understand any other human being. How can one human being know another human being since between them there always must lie this dusky area of variation? And since there are no ways of measuring it, no one can tell how vast may be this "Unplumbed, salt, estranging sea," which sets one man apart from every other man in an unintelligible isolation.

Such cheerless thoughts, however, do not often trouble us in the practical use of our native speech. For the most part we go ahead on the assumption that we understand others as they mean to be understood and that others understand us as we would be understood. We assume a kind of absolute value for dialects. It is only so that an active life is possible. If we paused every moment to wonder if our words were going to be rightly interpreted or if we had rightly interpreted the words of another, it would not be long before the desire either to speak or to hear would disappear from us. We would then spend our hours in silent brooding. Much more comfortable and more healthful is the lover-like conviction that there may be two minds with but a single thought, two hearts that beat as one. When we feel we know what another person means, then we think we know.

This fact of similarity and of differentiation in the use of English speech is the commonest of all linguistic observations. Everybody has remarked that people who speak English speak alike, and also that sometimes some persons speak English differently from others. The first or the second of these contrasting observations will seem the more remarkable according to the particular circumstances of the moment which calls it forth. The facts are different in kind, however, since the contemplation of the

degree of universality in language is of the nature of a philosophic reflection, but questions of difference are usually of practical concern.

Both of these two observations, however, are of more than passing significance. When one pauses to reflect upon them, they suggest problems of wide meaning, not always easy of solution. What has caused uniformity in the English language? What has prevented this uniformity from becoming absolute? Does a sound knowledge of our native speech encourage support of the principle of uniformity or of differentiation? Or if of both, what circumstances determine when and where choice shall be made between the two?

Questions like these point the way to the very heart of the life of language. If one could answer them completely, one would penetrate not only the mysteries of language but also not a few of the dark places in the general growth of the thought and feeling of mankind.

IV

THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

When one contemplates the multiplicity of the dialects of English speech, past and present, this wealth of material, however interesting it may be to the philologist, from the point of view of the practical use of the language seems extraordinarily ineffective and wasteful. One is thus led to inquire whether such diversity has always been present or is necessary in the life of the language. If the language is now imperfect, may it not have been at some time more perfect? If all our speech is now split into an infinity of clashing dialects, at some earlier and happier day may not unity and harmony and completer understanding have reigned instead? And if so, may we not then hope to recapture this earlier perfection?

These questions immediately lead one far beyond the limits of a single language. The question whether English has passed from simplicity and regularity to complexity and irregularity is seen to be a part of a much more general inquiry into the nature and origin of language. The broader question then becomes whether it is of the nature of language to start with a simple infallible system, and to develop in time those habits of untidiness and disorder which sometimes seem so distressing in the forms of a living speech like English. If some general principle of development of this kind can be ascertained, it should be very helpful as establishing a firm standing place from

which to view and to judge the shifting landscape of our present-day English.

The oldest answer to these questions is one that has often been given but no longer satisfies. It is as old as the tower of Babel and doubtless much older. It assumes that languages originated by the creative act of some ruler of the universe, the law-giver, as Plato designates him. Manifestly a being who could create a universe and a language would not create an imperfect language. He would create the perfect idea of language, and only as feeble humanity attempted to hold and to apply this idea in the practices of living would it become obscured and broken into many fragmentary representations of the original unity.

But this pleasing myth of the law-giver has lost its significance for the modern mind. It would be delightful, as Plato proposes, if one could arrive at ultimate truth by the way of this perfect language of the world's golden age. The law-giver as he made language made it to name the objects of thought perfectly. Therefore to know the mind, one need only know the names which properly designate the contents of the mind. Nothing more simple, if one could but hear the sweet sounds of the perfect idea of language as they first issued from the lips of the all-powerful law-giver. Needless to say, however, the modern science of language knows nothing of this original perfect and single speech of gods and mankind. It knows nothing of any primordial language organism which through the accidents of time has been shattered, each fragment, however, continuing its existence by a kind of process of fission. It holds out no hope that all the existing languages of the world and all that have ever existed

may be related to each other through a line of common descent. It does not deny, on the other hand, that this may be so, but it does deny that there are available facts either to prove or disprove this notion. The theme in short belongs at present in the field of the myth-making imagination, not of exact observation.

If the notion of the creation of language by a powerful law-giver and the bestowal of it as a gift upon mankind must be regarded as a myth, there remains the possibility of another kind of creation, that is, creation by man himself. But if the notion of a primitive law-giver is poetic, this other notion must be characterized as absurd. One cannot conceive of men as having arrived at that appointed stage of development when the idea of having a language should dawn upon them, and of their then sitting down to construct for themselves something to fill this suddenly realized need. Such things are indeed done in our own day. Councils and committees and conventions deliberate over languages and make them. Thus Esperanto was made, and Volapuk and Ido, and dozens of other artificial languages. But these are not real languages. They are only imitation languages, often very bad and sketchy imitations, and even so, possible only because the real languages provide the model for them. But in its human beginnings, the language of mankind was not made in committees and conventions. It grew, we may say, when men were sleeping, when they knew it not. And then after the process was completed, they awoke to the fact that they had a language. The first man who discovered that he had a language made a tremendous discovery. But he created nothing. The new world of language was there all the time, in the dim ocean of the

primitively unknown, waiting for some explorer to come and name it. And the curious fact is that by the time man discovered that he had a language, his power of invention in language had practically ceased. Civilized man is able to criticize language, but not to invent it. Primitive man can be said to be the creator of his language only in the sense that as he lived and developed, his language grew and developed with him.

Rejecting the grandiose notion of an original act of creation, divine or human, in language, as an unpromising approach to the question of unity and regularity, the inquirer may look more hopefully to the results of the modern study of the history of individual languages. One of the main results of this study has been the establishment of the notion of the so-called families of language. To continue the figure contained in the word "family," we know that English has sisters and cousins and second cousins and a host of more distant relatives in a large circle of connected languages. The science of linguistics has discovered many of these family groups in the languages of the world. Of these the one that most interests the western world is naturally the Indo-European family, comprising within itself practically all the anguages of Europe, ancient and modern, as well as some of those of central and western Asia, and in consequence of recent migrations, the current languages of the two Americas. Have all these languages sprung from a single common source, and if so, can we see in this original parent speech that perfection of simplicity and order which we would expect in an ideal speech?

The theory of a relational connection by which the languages of the Indo-European family are bound to each

other is well-founded. These languages do go back in a way to a common source, though the notion of a common family origin for the languages of the group does not carry with it the notion of a common race origin for all the peoples who speak the languages of the family. For very often languages are transferred to entirely alien races, as when the negroes of America gave up their native dialects for English, or the natives of the South Sea islands replace their Polynesian speech by some European tongue. Similar things must have happened again and again during the thousands of years of the life of the languages of the Indo-European family. But well-founded though the theory of the relationship of these languages may be, it leaves the further question still unanswered, what was the nature of the original parent speech? Was the original Indo-European parent speech merely a branch of a still larger family whose history is no longer traceable, or does it represent a genuinely primitive linguistic unity?

Unfortunately we have no direct knowledge of any Indo-European parent speech. If it existed, it existed long before the time of historical records of any kind. Its existence is indeed an inference, an inference based upon the fact of a large number of similarities among the various languages of the family which can be accounted for most reasonably by the supposition of a common origin. But the parent speech that can be reconstructed by means of the circumstantial evidence afforded by these several related languages of late date must be a very imperfect and meager speech. It can give no adequate picture of a language living upon the lips of men and women at a time when it had not yet differentiated into the several languages which we now know as our Indo-European

family. And if this common ancestry is an inference, it is obvious that there the quest must cease, so far as direct observation is concerned. It is possible to build inferences upon inferences, but only as an exercise of fancy, not as science. The notion of an original Indo-European parent speech is therefore a blind alley so far as these questions of primitive simplicity and complexity in speech are concerned.

The older theorists worked this conception of a simple unified parent speech very hard, and they thought they had found in it a plain solution for all the many difficulties of the history of language. Noah Webster, for example, writing in 1828, in the introduction to his *American Dictionary*, comments very seriously on the opinion of Dr. Alexander Murray, professor of Oriental languages in the University of Edinburgh, who maintained in his *History of the European Languages* that all the words in all the European languages could be carried back to nine root words. This simple system of nine root words Dr. Murray sets down explicitly and confidently. A learned philological treatise published at Zürich a hundred years later shows progress in that the nine primitive roots are here reduced to six, and from these six roots are derived not only the Indo-European languages, but all the languages of the human race!

But family relationships in languages can be studied without being carried back to the dim regions of remote antiquity. English has immediate relatives in German, in Dutch, in Danish, and in other Teutonic dialects. French we know to be close kin to Italian and Spanish, to name only the main divisions of this related group. All these Romanic languages are derived from Latin, and in

these languages we have perhaps the most manageable instance of a family group of languages. What can be inferred with respect to the notion of primal unity from these languages? But before this question can be discussed, both the term "derived" and the term "Latin" call for definition. French is not derived from Latin in the sense that it is the natural offspring of Latin. When the linguist speaks of a language as being derived from another, or when he speaks of a family of languages, he is using metaphors which must be understood only metaphorically. Languages have no generational existence, like animals sprung from animals, or plants generated from the seeds of other plants. Languages may be transferred or acquired, but strictly speaking cannot be derived or inherited.

But what was this Latin from which French is supposed to be descended? Can we think of Latin as providing a primitive unity so far as French is concerned? To this question the history of language answers decisively in the negative. In the first place the Latin of which French is a later form was in a great many respects different from the Latin of Vergil, Horace, and Cæsar. It was a popular speech, a vulgar Latin, so different from the literary speech that the literary speech is often quite useless when one attempts to account for the details of modern French. But the differentiation of popular and literary Latin is only the beginning of the distinctions that must be made in the meaning of the term "Latin." How many varieties or dialects of popular Latin were there? It is an obvious and a sufficient answer to this question to say that there must have been many, probably as many dialects of popular Latin in the days when Latin

was becoming French as there are of popular French today. In short, the quest for primitive unity by the historical route, as ever, ends only in disappointment. The farther it is carried, the more clearly one realizes that it is a fool's quest, a quest for an unreal, far-off world. What happened in the Romanic languages, undoubtedly happened also in the Germanic languages. The parent Germanic speech from which the various related Germanic languages are to be derived is not so definitely and minutely known as the parent Latin of the Romanic languages, but if it were, without question it would be found to be just as complex and variable.

A certain illusion of simplicity is sometimes produced when one looks at some of the languages of antiquity. The grammar, for example, of classic Latin seems remarkably simple and orderly. But one must remember that the usual descriptive Latin grammar is based upon a comparatively few texts, Cæsar, Horace, Vergil, and a few others, and that these texts have been highly regularized by copyists in transmission. The language represented by the Latin grammars is not a real and a spoken but a theoretical and literary language. Gothic is still more regular, is in fact almost a perfect system. But the doubt will not down that the Gothic language as we know it, and our knowledge is derived from a very small body of text, was made to order, was again a language of theory and not of reality. The farther back one goes in the study of a particular language, the easier it is to make a perfect system of it. This is true because the farther back we go, the less we can know about a language, and the less we know, the easier it is to reduce our knowledge to order. Only in the living present do we reach our

maximum of knowledge, and also in the living present do we realize the hopelessness of ever reducing a real language to an orderly statement.

If neither philosophy nor history provides any justification for belief in a far-off golden age of language, perhaps a third way of approach to the question may yield results more encouraging. Genuinely primitive conditions are more readily reached through the study of the mind than by the examination of historical records. The most ancient of records of the past are but as the words of yesterday in the long perspective of time. Immature and undeveloped mind, however, may be extremely remote, for the standard by which we measure distance here is not one merely of years and centuries, which in themselves have no significance, but a standard of cultural development. Looking back then to the primitive psychology of human speech, what are the evidences with respect to this notion of original simplicity and orderliness?

First of all, one might examine the speech of infancy. The infant, it is true, does not learn its speech independently and separately, but largely by imitation and in relationships to various other individuals. In this respect, however, the sophisticated infant of modern days certainly does not differ from the infant of the stone age. Even in the beginnings of speech, human beings were social creatures. They had learned the playful trick of imitation, and by means of it were gradually building up their culture history.

Taking the infant of today, however, as the only one we know, and as representing the childhood of the race, no one would dream of finding in its early gurgles and babblings the simplicity and order which the adult speech

so lamentably lacks. When the infant reaches the age at which it is ripe to learn the speech of its race, it has at command an infinite quantity of the raw materials of speech, much of which it will never be able to use. And that adult speech is not merely a fragmentary recollection of these primitive elements of infant speech is proved by the fact that the teeth play an important part in all adult speech. Just when must one look for the infantile golden age of speech, before or after the child acquires teeth? But certainly the speech impulse comes before teeth are developed and it would seem that teeth therefore must mark the beginning of that downward career of corruption and disorganization in speech in which all the later days of the infant are to be spent.

These inferences with respect to the beginnings of speech derived from the observation of infants are duplicated when one contemplates the notion of the infancy of the race. No infants of the race can come under our direct gaze or be heard by our physical ears. It calls for no great stretching of the imagination, however, to hear them in their first experiments in speech, their chatterings, repetitions, squeaks, growls, lyric notes, shrieks of anger, mumblings of comfort and content, all the multitudinous assemblage of sounds in the great human orchestra tuning up and preparing for action. In these first experiments there was material for many languages. In speech as in other respects uncontrolled and undeveloped nature is prodigal and wasteful. But simplicity and order were not characteristics of these early experiments. An orchestra tuning up can make sounds enough for a dozen symphonies, but the symphonies are not present, even potentially, in all these preliminary tootings and scrapings.

The further back we go, we must conclude, the less we meet with these admirable qualities of simplicity and orderliness in speech. They seem not to be original gifts, but in so far as we have them, they are acquisitions. There never was a golden age in speech, never any age more golden than the present — in whatever day we may choose to think of the present. For speech, so long as it has been in existence, has been the plaything and the instrument of living men and women, and as such has shared in the perfections and imperfections of living men and women. Judging from his speech, mankind seems always to have had by nature a controlling instinct for disorderliness with a saving passion for orderliness. There is comfort in the thought, therefore, that if English seems untidy today, it has always been so. Perhaps we may go still further and find a guiding principle in the conclusion that a living feeling for a language with all its sins upon it is a safer foundation to build upon than a neat and perfect theory.

V

A TOUCHSTONE FOR ENGLISH

Though no apple contains in itself a perfect and complete combination of all the characteristics that may appear in apples, yet a person eating an apple is never in doubt that any particular apple is an apple. So also, although no aspect of English is the absolute and essential language, nevertheless any individual manifestation of English is immediately recognizable as English. What is the test, the touchstone, in this infinite variety, by which one determines that a particular form of speech is or is not a part of the English language?

The statement that English is immediately recognizable as English, calls for a little qualification. There may be crude and contaminated dialects, the speech of foreigners learning English or of children not yet at home in their native speech, which might seem doubtfully English or not English. But these are not stable forms of speech. They are only in process of development, and given time they will inevitably grow into something which is definitely and recognizably English of some sort, or into something which falls unmistakably beyond the limits of English.

Bilingual persons also who dwell in communities in which two languages are currently spoken may use either of the two languages, as in parts of Switzerland the natives speak French and German indifferently, or may mix the two in proportions which make it doubtful whether the resulting language belongs on one side of the Rhine or on

the other. So also in Pennsylvania a speech may be heard which seems to hover uncertainly between English and German. But this doubt applies only to the general proportions of the mixture. All the separate details of these mixed dialects are recognizably either French or English or German, and the genuine Frenchman and the genuine Englishman and the genuine German each selects with decision the parts that are his own and leaves the rest.

When the English language appears in what may be called its full flower and flavor, it becomes one of the surest expressions of a cultural unity that extends far beyond language itself. In this unity, as we must continually insist, there is room for very wide diversity. The unity of the English language by no means implies an identity of practice among all those who are accustomed to use the English tongue. One of the rhetoricians' requirements for good English is that it must be national English, that is, the English of a large group of persons. This is not an unreasonable requirement, but how can there be such a thing as national English unless the term national is broad enough to include the speech of all those who together make the nation? The touchstone by which one tests a national English must therefore have not a single facet but many facets.

Obviously, therefore, it will not do to dispose of any particular word or phrase which happens not to be in one's own dialect, or in the dialect that one approves, by saying *That isn't English.* The touchstone of English must be one that will do more than draw to it, like a magnet, only speech of a single kind. What I approve or what I disapprove in speech may be an important matter in determining my chosen relations to my fellowmen, but

my choices do not exhaust the possible choices of the language. Even ungrammatical and incorrect English is still English, and the person who chooses these ungrammatical and incorrect forms of speech, whether he does so knowingly or unknowingly, cannot be pushed completely beyond the circle that marks the limits of the English language.

A more adequate touchstone for English may perhaps be sought in the term idiomatic English. English is said to be genuinely English when it is idiomatic. Now the terms "idiom" and "idiomatic" call for a moment's examination. A very common notion of idioms is that they are forms of the language which lie beyond grammatical explanation. The great body of the language, according to this conception, is grammatically explicable, but here and there crop up peculiar phrases and constructions as unaccountable as the whims and fancies that appear in the personal characters of our friends. And these idioms, being so individual, so racy of the life of the language, are just the parts that express most fully the essential nature of the language, just as one may know one's friends best by their foibles and eccentricities.

But this is an imperfect and shallow understanding of the term "idiom." For in the first place there are no forms of the language which are beyond interpretation in the sense that they are the expression of an uncontrolled and unregulated and irresponsible genius in the language. All forms of speech have originated in the minds of individuals, and the mental processes which have produced them can all be analyzed and placed under grammatical categories, if the categories of grammar are only made wide and subtle enough.

The fact that a particular form of speech does not fall readily into place under the wide and obvious generalizations of conventional grammar is no reason for regarding it as abnormal. Thus a sentence like *He stood in awe of them* may seem at first thought to satisfy the definition of an idiom as something unanalyzable. It is also peculiar to English, for the other languages of Europe related to English have no construction parallel to this. It might thus be regarded as a phrase that one must take as it is, without too much examination, for if one stops to reflect, it seems grotesque to speak of standing in awe. What is awe that one can stand in it?

There is needed, however, in considering this and other supposedly unexplainable idioms of the language, a conception of the grammar of the language broad enough to include the historical origins not only of the simple and obviously regular features of the language, but also of its less frequent peculiarities. Historically considered the sentence *He stood in awe of them* is not at all beyond grammatical analysis. Its earliest form in Old English would have been something like *Him stood awe of them*, in which *awe* is the subject of *stood*, and *him* is in the dative case. The verb *stood* also had an Old English meaning of motion, not of stationary position, as it may still have in certain Modern English constructions, as when a ship stands out to sea, or in the command *Stand by to go about*, or when one is bidden to stand from under a dangerous place. So the original Old English construction might be paraphrased *Awe of them rose up in him*, as anger swells in the breast. But this paraphrase does not give the customary order of words of the sentence in Old English. Ordinarily in Old English the dative came first in the emphatic position,

then the verb and then the subject, the respective cases of the dative and nominative being indicated by an inflectional distinction which disappeared, so far as nouns are concerned, in later stages of the language. In the gradual development of English through Middle to Modern English, however, the feeling for a fixed sentence word order became so firmly established, with three almost invariable positions, subject, verb, and then object, that this sentence was made over, and made over mechanically, to conform to the general rule. Thus the dative *him* was changed to a subject *he*, the verb remained, and as the verb *stand* does not ordinarily take an object, the preposition *in* was brought down, one may say from heaven, to take care of the original subject *awe*. This yielding to word order may seem a reprehensible way for the language to have behaved, but there was nothing irrational or inexplicable about it. Very much the same process has resulted in the Modern English usage, *He was given his choice*, condemned by some grammarians and rhetoricians, but nevertheless current English. The subject here was originally dative, and the noun now at the end of the sentence, whatever case one may decide it to be, was originally the subject, that is, *Him was given his choice.* But the dative *him* became a nominative *he* because it stood in the position before the verb, and the original subject was kept on in the after-the-verb position, with the consequence that we now have in Modern English practically a passive verb with an object.

Processes of this general kind are not peculiar to the English language. They take place in every language. There is consequently nothing abnormal about them either psychologically or linguistically. Every language has its

seemingly strange idioms that have grown up under historical conditions and which with the aid of history are seen to be rational and intelligible. They have laws of their own, and though they may be exceptional in relation to some other and more general grammatical law, obviously they can be understood and judged only in the light of their own grammatical development.

Nor can these idioms be supposed to express the essential nature of the language better than any other and more regular parts of it. They are not primitive untamed survivals from the infancy of the speech, but are more likely to be late developments, resulting from some obscuring analogy or some partial dilapidation in the language. To the grammarian they open up pleasant opportunities for speculation and investigation, but to the stranger learning the language, they are a burden and an affliction.

Much more inclusive than this grammatical conception of idiom is another which makes the term practically synonymous with the speech of a nation or a people. Thus the idiom of the English people is the language by the possession of which they are most readily recognized to be a people, that is, the English language. This speech is the peculiar language possession of the English people. It is their distinctive linguistic mark, just as French is the distinctive linguistic mark, the idiom of the French people.

Manifestly, however, this sense of the term "idiom" is of little avail in the attempt to discover some touchstone, some test, by the application of which one can discover the grounds of assurance one has that English is genuinely English. For if the English idiom is the peculiar speech of the English people, the term is merely a synonym for

the English language. Every nation, every race of people, has its peculiar idiom in this sense. The term is all inclusive, embracing everything which gives to the nation, or the race, its sense of linguistic unity. But as it is merely the name for the whole group of the language experiences of the race, obviously it provides no test by which the curious inquirer can determine that any particular fact of language is or is not properly idiomatic.

A different kind of test of the authenticity of any particular form of English would be one which examines it from the point of view of its authority. The question to be considered here is naturally the character of the authority any English must enjoy before one can confidently affirm it to be English. What sanction must English speech receive before it can be included sympathetically within the circle of the English idiom?

One kind of authority might conceivably be that of usage. The English language by this test would be the language commonly accepted in the usage of the English people. But how general must this acceptance and this usage be in order to give it such qualifying power? Few uses, perhaps no uses, in the English language, are universal in their occurrence. Just how general must a form of English speech be to acquire the right to be called English idiom? And the more general a form of speech becomes, does it become thereby the more idiomatic? By this test ungrammatical English, since it is undoubtedly the speech of greater numbers of English persons than grammatical speech, would be more idiomatic than the conventionally correct uses of the language.

It is not true, however, that a form of speech must be widely or even familiarly used in order to be immediately

recognizable and acceptable as English. This assertion can be verified by reading almost any English poet. In the lines of the poets will be found forms of expression never before heard in the language, often never again repeated in it. English poetry is full of compound words which have been invented by the poets for immediate occasions and which have never been used again. When Shakspere wrote of the "swart-complexioned night," [1] or of "self-substantial fuel," [2] it matters little whether or not anyone had done the same before him or has done so after him. He wrote these words in an English context, with the expectation that they would be accepted as English words by his readers, and they became thereby, and to the extent to which they have been read and understood, parts of the English language.

It is a pertinent question therefore to ask, When does a word become an English word? By a judicial decision in a court of law in the State of New York it was once decreed that a word shall be known as an English word by the fact that it is recorded in the reputable dictionaries of the language. This decision may have been practically convenient to the judge and others concerned in enabling them to reach an agreed opinion on what should be called English, but it was not a linguistically sound decision. For the fact of inclusion in reputable dictionaries does not necessarily make a word English. The words *zeitgeist* and *hinterland* will be found in reputable dictionaries, but it is questionable whether many persons feel them to be English words. So also, with *bonne*, a nurse, *demi tasse*, *déjeuner*, *éclat*, and other French words. The dictionaries contain moreover hundreds of words of a scientific char-

[1] *Sonnet* XXVIII. [2] *Sonnet* I.

acter never meant to be spoken by human lips and practically never heard by human ears. Are all these scientific monstrosities parts of the English idiom?

On the other hand, the fact that a word is not contained in reputable dictionaries is no proof that the word does not occur as a living element in the language. It is true that in this day of competitive dictionary making few words current in the language are likely to escape the collector. The dictionary makers are more likely to err on the side of including words doubtfully English than on the side of omitting words genuinely English. But the dictionary makers have not always been so industrious. The comprehensive, encyclopedic dictionary of modern times is of fairly recent origin. Dr. Johnson's dictionary was small compared with the many-volumed lexicons of our day. And before Dr. Johnson, in the beginnings of English lexicography, word treasures of this sort were still smaller. But the language itself, especially in its practical uses, was not appreciably smaller. The dictionaries have increased enormously in size, but this growth does not mean a corresponding increase in the expressive possibilities of the language. It merely means that many more elements long present are more fully recorded. The citations under *do* and *make* in the *New English Dictionary*, for example, cover many pages. There was a time when no dictionaries at all existed, and still the English language was there. And if all the English dictionaries that have ever been made were completely wiped out of existence and recollection, the language would remain, and the words comprising it would have as much authority and justification for their existence in the language as they have now. Dictionaries are in short

merely a record of language after the event. They do not make the facts of language, but at most can only faithfully describe them.

Every cultivated language of the modern world contains many words of foreign origin. In English these constitute no inconsiderable part of the vocabulary. Sometimes these foreign words retain the character of foreign elements, but often they become embodied in the language so completely that they cease altogether to be foreign and become simply English. For it scarcely need be said that the etymological origin of a word has nothing to do with determining the ultimate fate of it. In the English language are words from German, French, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, and a dozen other languages which have become as English as any of the words of purest Anglo-Saxon descent. Only the expert etymologist is aware of the fact that these foreign words have not always been accustomed to English surroundings. How have these words become English, and what is the test by which we shall know that a foreign word is no longer foreign but has changed its nature?

One plan often proposed runs to the effect that a word shall be considered a foreign word as long as it retains the form and pronunciation of the word in the language from which it is derived, and that it shall be considered as having become an English word when it has become Anglicized in form and pronunciation. Thus *cadet* is an English word, because English pronounces the final *t*, whereas French does not. One might urge that a complete Anglicization of *cadet* would put the stress on the first syllable. But if *cadet* becomes English only because the final *t* is pronounced, then *buffet* cannot be English, since

the final *t* is not pronounced. Yet the common fact of experience is that countless numbers of people, in homes, hotels, and on railway trains, use the word *buffet* without the slightest realization that it is anything but an English word.

A moment ago the words *zeitgeist* and *hinterland* were mentioned as doubtfully English, but if they are doubtful, it is not because they look and sound like German words. The word *kindergarten* is just as German as either of the other two, and yet *kindergarten* may be successfully defended as a genuine English word — that is, English in the sense that it is a part of the idiom of the race. So we have many words like this in the language, foreign in form and as foreign in pronunciation as the pronunciation of one language is likely to permit the pronunciation of the words of another language to be. Such words are *matinée*, *studio*, *soprano*, *alto*, *mirage*, *garage*, and other similar terms from French and Italian. Not a few English words are perfectly good Latin in sound and appearance, words like *bonus*, *onus*, *index*, *data*, *referendum*, *opera*, *vim*, *sculptor*, and many other words with the ending *-or*. In the light of these illustrations, one must say therefore that the visual form of a foreign word and the aural form of it have little or nothing to do with determining whether or not it has become an English word. For a foreign word may remain unchanged in both and still by test of experience be an English word.

If etymological origins, grammatical analysis, extent of use and other similar rules prove to be unsatisfactory tests whereby English may justify itself, apparently one must appeal to a different kind of court. The tests so far proposed have the advantage of being definite and con-

crete, but they have the disadvantage of not reaching far enough in explaining the facts under consideration. Etymology, grammar, usage, these are all factors in the practical experiences which together make up the English idiom, but there is something beyond any of these experimental observations and of greater significance in determining our sense of the unity and the living character of our native speech.

What this something is only a psychologist should venture to set forth with full realization of its origins and its many subtle ramifications. But the thing itself is common enough in every man's experience — is in fact a necessary part of his experience. It is so simple that pride of intellect may lead to the rejection of it as unworthy to serve as a source of linguistic light and leading. It is, in a word, the feeling for the mother tongue. What we feel to be English, we know to be English. If we do not feel a form of speech to be English, no amount of etymological learning, of refined grammatizing, of rational explanation of any kind can make that form of speech seem English to us. Only when we accept it and incorporate it into the living structure whereby we realize ourselves as having a native speech can a word or a phrase become a part of our idiomatic English. The reason is not needed as a guide to the recognition of a native speech. One does not recognize one's mother tongue by definition, but by the unassailable evidence and the direct knowledge of feeling. The idiomatic life of the language is not something external, to be constructed by the accumulation of a number of demonstrable facts. It lies within us, a part of every person's living experience.

This feeling for the mother tongue is of slow and long

growth. It has its beginnings in the earliest years of infancy, and it does not stop growing until speech together with all other mental faculties ceases forever. The elements which enter into the formation of the feeling for the mother tongue are incalculable in number, and in subtlety and variety they surpass any man's power to know them. They are elements arising not only from the experiences of the individual in his own inner personal world, but also from the experiences of the individual in his relations to all other beings by whom he is surrounded. The feeling for the mother tongue is indeed an epitome of the whole personal and social experiences of the persons whose life it expresses.

If a feeling of this kind is our surest touchstone by which to know that English is English, then our test becomes the most subjective of all tests. This indeed is necessary from the nature of language. The English language has no existence as a speech apart from the experience of individuals. It exists in no dictionary, in no man's grammatical description, however elaborate, of the language. It has being only as it is an active part in the mental and emotional life of men and women. But we have already pointed out that men and women in their use of language are divided into an infinite number of separate groups or dialects. No two men can be absolutely the same in their use of language, and no two men can feel absolutely the same even with respect to what we call their common speech. It results therefore that what I feel to be English must be English — for me, and that what you feel to be English, must be English — for you. What is English to me, cannot be English in precisely the same way to any other person. Certain forms

of speech may seem English to other persons which seem to me not at all English. To some speakers even *zeitgeist* and *hinterland*, *bonne* and *déjeuner* may seem English. Everything depends upon feeling, upon the degree of assurance with which a word or other usage is drawn within the circle of sympathetic inclusion in the language. Even in the heart of the same person this feeling may not always be the same. At one moment a word may be used without the slightest shadow of doubt or hesitation as to its being authentic English. At another moment, and in other circumstances, we may reject the word altogether, or use it only with mental quotation marks around it.

What I feel to be English therefore may not and need not arouse a similar experience in my neighbors. In all probability it will, for the large sense of unity in the language comes from the fact that under like circumstances, various persons will have approximately the same reactions. In the end the sum of these approximate similars in the speech habits of the group may come to exert a far-reaching control over the linguistic actions of individuals through the establishment of a kind of moral tone for the use of the language. But the exercise of this control is subtle and diffused, and it is like speech itself, one of the general social possessions of the group.

The extraordinary vitality and variability of the language come home to us when we reflect on the millions of users of the language, each with his own individual sense of the life of the native idiom, each sure of himself within his own circle, and yet each at the same time genuinely living only because his little circle is part of the great circle of the language. The life of the language

thus has a double aspect, and like all life, we can know it only because we experience it. But the unity of linguistic feeling by which one realizes the greater circle of the language does not necessarily imply approval of all within the circle. There are empires within the great empire. We may agree to call many uses idiomatic English which we do not commend or propose to put into practice. Approval and disapproval are minor aspects and moods of the all-embracing life of the language. But in the dispassionate observation of this life, there is a world of interesting matters to reward the student of our mother tongue. Custom cannot stale her infinite variety. Only the pedantry of narrow precisianists can do that. When our native speech sits close to the hearts of the English people, as all speech should, it is quick and manifold in its changes. It is a great ocean of speech, closed within its own shores, but never twice the same in the many forms which its moving waters are constantly taking.

VI

THE LEVELS OF ENGLISH SPEECH

In the fluctuations of daily use, the separation of English into types or kinds is a matter of such common experience that certain well determined manners of expression are readily observable. Whether these types shall be known as dialects, a term perhaps sufficiently discussed in a preceding chapter, is a question of definition over which it is not necessary to delay at present. But the types of expression themselves, and the mental attitudes for which they stand, are of some interest as helpful guides among the many possible directions to which English speech may turn.

Among those who pay any heed at all to convention in social relationships, a difference of degree is implicit in all use of English. This difference of degree is usually thought of in terms of higher and lower, of upper levels of speech appropriate to certain occasions of more formal character, of lower levels existing, if not necessarily appropriate, among less elevated circumstances. These popular distinctions of level may be accepted without weighting them too heavily with significance in respect of good, better, and best in speech. A disputatious person might very well raise the question whether literary English, ordinarily regarded as being on a high level, is really any better than the spoken word, is really as good as the spoken word, warm with the breath of the living moment. In accepting these distinctions of level as a

point of departure, however, the purpose in the present chapter will not be to debate any remote and theoretical questions of values, but rather to proceed from distinctions generally recognized, even though not very conclusively defined, in order to observe the grounds upon which they are based.

When one arranges things according to a system of levels, perhaps the simplest way to regard the system is to fix one's attention first on the middle level, to which the outer upper and lower levels may then be related as extremes. What then is the middle level of English speech, that form of it which is least open to qualification of a special kind, which stands, one may say, as a kind of pivotal center in the revolving universe of the English language?

This speech must obviously be the one in the operations of which the normal qualities of speech as a general social activity most representatively reveal themselves, both as we look at speech today and as we look back upon it in the perspective of its changes through countless ages of evolution. The name most appropriate for this central and pivotal English is General Colloquial. Of all the forms of speech this is the one least conditioned by special applications, being the speech not of occasional experiences but the constant companion of the great middle group of English speaking persons in all their familiar moments. A degree lower than General Colloquial brings one to the level of Popular English, and a step still lower — beyond which there seems to be no need to proceed — brings one to the level of Vulgar English. Starting again at the middle level of General Colloquial and moving in the opposite direction, the first stage is reached at

Formal Colloquial, and the next and final upper limit at Literary English. Concerning each of these levels of English speech it is now necessary to add a few words of further qualification and description.

In its simple etymological sense the term "colloquial" means spoken, and colloquial English would therefore be the English of spoken conversation. As here employed, however, and especially with the qualification "general" added to it, the word means something a little more narrowly defined. It means that language of conversation which passes as acceptable anywhere in conversation, a language easy without being slovenly or illiterate, and conventional without being formal or pedantic. It is a form of language which raises no questions, its ends being adequately attained when it secures a harmonious understanding among persons in their social relationships. It is necessarily a language of cultivated conversation, a more or less chosen English, since only the cultivated person has command of those forms of speech which enable the speaker to take his place easily in any group of persons with whom the chances of living may bring him in contact.

That this speech has characteristics appropriate to itself, and therefore its own justifications, becomes readily apparent when one examines the details of it. In such simple matters as contractions, for example, colloquial speech employs forms which custom everywhere sanctions as proper to the tone of conversation. Thus one does not say *I am leaving town tomorrow*, though one might write this. What one says is *I'm leaving town tomorrow*. Other similar contractions are *they're* for *they are*, *he'd* for *he would*, *mustn't* for *must not*, and so almost without end. Conversation which avoided such forms would cease to

be normal conversation, would lose all that quality of ease and naturalness which is necessary to make conversation endurable. To regard such forms of speech as corruptions or as careless lapses from propriety would be to violate the essential nature of colloquial speech. For the merits of conversational English cannot be estimated by applying to it tests of excellence which may be appropriate in different styles of speech. At times one may be in doubt whether one should or should not be conversational, but then the question raised is one of choice between two levels. Thus one may hesitate in writing over the choice between *he isn't* and *he is not*, *they'll* and *they will*, but the matter to be decided here is whether one wishes to carry over the color of colloquial speech into writing and into print or to change from a familiar to a more formal style. Each may have its own justifications, but the qualities of the one are not determined by the qualities of the other.

Colloquial tone is not merely a matter of contractions, but it appears also in a great variety of other uses. The current intensives and adjectives of approval and disapproval frequently express the distinctively colloquial quality of speech. Thus any cultivated speaker might say *I'm awfully sorry to have missed you* without hesitation, though in more formal English the word *awfully* would probably be used only with recognition of its historical and literary connotations. Every language is rich in these expressive terms which have been more or less torn from their etymological settings, but which are not exaggerations, since the conventions of colloquial use have made them appropriate to the somewhat heightened tone of colloquial occasions. If a man were going to a concert

and leaving his wife at home with a headache, he might very properly say *I hate to go away and have a good time and leave you here alone*, and the wife might well answer, *O don't mind me, I'll get along*, yet the verbs *hate* and *mind* in these sentences, and the phrase *get along*, to say nothing of the structure of the sentences as wholes, are all so characteristic of colloquial use that elsewhere they would be out of place. But to deprive colloquial speech of these expressive turns would deliver the death blow to all conversation. Conversation may be toned down and formalized, but every alteration in these directions is a move away from those qualities which give conversation its essential character. By cultivation any person may acquire the habit of speaking like a book, but nobody can at the same time speak like a book and a living human being. Cultivation in colloquial speech is an admirable thing, but only when it is cultivation in the right direction.

General colloquial speech obviously is not fixed by an inflexible code — it varies infinitely as circumstances vary. Like good manners, it must adapt itself to all changes of situation. Striking the proper tone in speech, the happy medium between slovenliness and pedantry, calls for quickness of perception and sensitiveness to all the delicate fluctuations in the social atmosphere. But just at what point does colloquial ease pass into slovenliness? Is it slovenly merely to be colloquial? Only a hard puritanism, however, would deny the right to existence of the more familiar social relationships and their expression. Yet it is not always apparent where one should draw the line between colloquial ease and slovenliness. To be sure, the line must be drawn at different places at different times, some situations, even in culti-

vated conversation, permitting greater ease than others. The test of slovenliness must therefore always be found in the immediate situation. What the customs of cultivated conversation permit cannot be slovenly. If this looks somewhat like reasoning in a circle, since it seems merely to say that when conversation becomes slovenly, it ceases to be cultivated, it remains nevertheless the only practicable test that can be applied. For it is an inescapable condition that the quality appropriate to conversation is something that can be determined only by conversation itself. Colloquial English is not slovenly by the measure of formal or of literary English, but only by its own standards. That these standards are continually shifting has already been pointed out. That they may vary also from person to person is also evident. If therefore the term General Colloquial be taken as applying to the speech of cultivated conversation, the only question to be answered in a given situation is whether the conversation really is cultivated. To this question obviously no single or infallible answer can be given. Every speaker must answer the question for himself and at his own peril if he answers it wrongly. Yet perhaps occasional errors of judgment should not be condemned too severely, since living speech is a most human and therefore fallible accomplishment. The unforgivable sin is that of the precisian who evades the whole difficulty of conversational adaptation by substituting something for colloquial speech which is not the language of men and women in their natural conversational moments.

From these considerations it becomes apparent that on this level of general colloquial English, the proper antithesis to slovenly speech is not formal or pedantic speech,

but distinguished speech. All cultivated conversation does not possess the same degree of charm and attractiveness. Differences of level are observable even on the one general level. Just what it is that gives distinction to any person's conversational speech is something that cannot be put down in the form of a simple, practicable recipe. Certainly distinction does not reside merely in being different. The quest for novelty may lead only to the eccentric, the affected, or the bizarre. A truly distinguished conversational style is one that secures its quality without violence to the essential simplicity and sincerity inherent in all urbane social intercourse. That it is not an absolute quality, but a matter of opinion, like all uses of language which reflect social adaptations, must never be forgotten. What any person regards as distinguished depends very much upon his background of association and experience, upon what he reacts from as well as towards. Distinction in colloquial speech may be defined as that quality of conversational style which shows speech at its best as each person views it in the light of his own aspirations and experiences. That it implies cultivation is nothing peculiar to a distinguished style, for all general colloquial uses rest upon a foundation of cultivation, a basis of accepted and approved customs in speech. The difference between a distinguished and a commonplace conversational style, or between the more distinguished and the less distinguished, is merely that the former exhibits shades of admired expression which have not hitherto appeared within the circle of experience of the commonplace speaker. Once perceived, however, they may be eagerly grasped, and when this happens, the art of cultivation in speech moves one step forward and

provides the speaker with a new satisfaction as he sees himself grow in the arduous process of making himself not merely intelligible but also interesting and attractive to his fellow-beings.

The determining mark of General Colloquial English as here described being its acceptability as the speech of cultivated conversation, so the distinctive thing about Popular English is that it lacks this acceptability, that it is not, in other words, an admired and cultivated form of speech. On the popular level belong all those types of speech commonly designated as incorrect, ungrammatical, illiterate, provincial, rustic, and so through various other degrees of more or less qualified discommendation. Numerically it is not the speech of a small or limited class, for the distinctive forms of popular speech are undoubtedly often more widely distributed than the forms of General Colloquial speech. The term "general" in this terminology, however, does not mean approximately universal, but only generally acceptable in the circles in which propriety of speech is of some concern. The individual character of Popular English lies just in the fact that it is not generally acceptable on the cultivated level. It may be a highly effective, a vigorous and picturesque speech, the speech of persons esteemed for their integrity, for their ability, or for any number of virtues. It often has something of the poetic quality found in the ballads and other forms of folk poetry. These virtues have nothing to do with the fact, however, that certain customs of speech are acceptable in cultivated conversation and others are not. Neither is it a matter of importance that these acceptable customs are established by convention, and that in themselves they may be no better than the customs

current on the popular level. Argument on such questions as social proprieties is of little avail. When a person who uses Popular English is described as "a very nice, ungrammatical person," this description places both the one described and the one who does the describing with no little exactness in a social scale. The term "popular" manifestly does not necessarily carry with it any implications of contempt or scorn. One may love one's fellow-beings even if they are ungrammatical — that is, with the kind of love with which one loves the world at large. Or if with more fervor, then because the ardors of passion have for the time triumphed over the serener enthusiasms of respect for convention.

The kind of English in general called slang falls on the popular level. Despite its freshness and vitality, slang does not possess that particular stamp of approval which enables it to pass as generally acceptable in cultivated conversation. If it becomes thus generally acceptable, it ceases to be slang, and a great many of the words and phrases now established in general colloquial use formerly carried with them the peculiar flavor of slang. In fact, many of the forms of popular English have always shown a strong tendency to move in the direction of general colloquial use, though the current flows no more powerfully in this than in the opposite direction. But so long as slang possesses the clearly marked individuality which gives it a name and its typical characteristics, so long the cultivated speaker will struggle to keep it in its proper place. He may not altogether refuse to use slang, but when he does use it, he will realize that he is indulgently forgetting or radically extending the limits which he knows are ordinarily set as the bounds of generally acceptable

cultivated speech. The person who never troubles his head over the question of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, obviously may use slang very abundantly without realizing that he is doing so, for slang becomes slang only when it is projected against a background which is not slang. But such distinctions mean nothing to the habitual user of slang on the level of popular speech. Like the ungrammatical speaker, he takes the customs of speech as they are handed to him, innocent of any vexing doubts as to desirability or undesirability, of propriety or impropriety, or of what would seem to him the fine-spun refinement between General Colloquial and Popular English.

Expletives and oaths are an instructive class of words in which to examine the changing attitudes of convention in the use of speech. Even on the general colloquial level certain expletives pass without question, such mild locutions, for example, as *dear me*, *goodness*, *gracious*, *heavens*, *great* or *good heavens*, and many more. Yet the limits of permissibility, especially in English, are soon reached. The conventions of other languages, French, Italian, and German, for example, are not so strict, and in them even the name of the Deity may be invoked in polite conversation. English on the popular level is less inhibited in the use of these expletives than it is in general colloquial speech, and at a still lower level many expletives and oaths, as for example the use of the name of the second member of the Trinity as a casual adornment of speech, are current as outright vulgarities. At this point, however, the violation of taste has become so extreme that it may no longer be regarded as a pardonable variation in conventional standards but as a heedless and an offensive

disregard of the sentiments of others. For the same reason it is sometimes held that the discussion of religion is in bad taste in mixed assemblages. The reason is that since religion is likely to be a matter of very intimate and personal concern to many people, one therefore that they do not readily submit to the public gaze, very rarely can it be discussed in mixed society with that freedom and ease which are essential to good general conversation. If some urgent necessity demands that it shall be discussed, then the occasion ceases to be one for polite conversation and becomes a debate or an argument.

The forms of affirmation and negation constitute another interesting group in which one may examine the subtle variations of cultivated use. A plain blunt *Yes* or *No* satisfies very few situations, in reality only those in which a strong emphasis is desired. Ordinarily one qualifies by saying, *Yes, I think so*, or *No, I don't believe I can.* The language possesses a great many ways of expressing assent or denial. Thus one says *I shall be glad to come* as the equivalent of *Yes*, even when the joy is not overwhelming. So also in French, the simple *Oui* or *Non* are not polite usage, though one may say *Mais oui* or *Mais non.* French, moreover, undoubtedly has as many varieties of manner for softening a too blunt directness as English. The titles of address to be attached to words of affirmation and negation are also matters of importance. Such forms as *Yes, mister, Yes, miss* occur only in shopkeepers' or servants' English. Polite usage requires that the surname be added to the title, and *Yes, Mr. White* or *Yes, Miss White* are permissible, though of course somewhat formal English. Good use in French is just the reverse, and to say *Oui, Monsieur Blanc*, or *Oui,*

Mademoiselle Blanc would imply a certain tinge of impertinence, the polite forms being merely, *Oui, monsieur, Oui, mademoiselle.* On rational grounds the French custom seems no better than the English or the English no better than the French. But customs of this kind are not determined on rational grounds. Convention establishes them, and convention is their sufficient authority. Sometimes convention is unsettled, as in the use of English *sir* and *ma'am.* Children are sometimes taught to say *Yes, sir* and *Yes, ma'am* to their elders, but an adult who should address a fellow adult in this way would be insulting. Even children, however, are not now generally taught to say *Yes, sir, No, sir, Yes, ma'am, No, ma'am* to their elders, the modern attitude being that children are not an inferior race, to be classed with slaves and servants, but in social relationships the equals of their elders and privileged to use the same forms of polite language as their elders. Yet in certain sections the older customs still linger. In regions of the South it is still polite custom for children to address their parents with the forms *Yes, sir, No, sir, Yes, ma'am, No, ma'am,* and this applies even after children have reached the age of maturity. The custom is to be regarded as a stray survival from the formality of an earlier generation, and in the South also it is disappearing.

Like the word "colloquial" as designating a level of speech, the term "vulgar" is susceptible of a double meaning, the one taken from the etymological origins of the word, the other a secondary and derivative sense. By origin the word "vulgar" means merely common, that which is the common possession of the people. Thus the Vulgate is the Latin translation of the Bible, Latin being

the vulgar or common tongue of Italy in the fourth century when the translation was made. In English the phrase *vulgar tongue* still survives in the sense of the common language of a people, not merely the language of common people, but the general national idiom, as contrasted for example with some learned, literary, or otherwise limited kind of speech. So also we speak of *vulgar errors*, meaning thereby things generally but wrongly believed. But it is not this primary sense of vulgar which is intended here as descriptive of a level of speech. From it readily issues a secondary meaning as designating things offensive to persons of refinement or good taste. The word "common" has gone the same way as vulgar, that which is common being not merely general but sometimes also coarse and offensive. What then is it in language which justifies one in applying this term "vulgar" to it at certain levels? What is it that makes language coarse and offensive?

In the first place a distinction must be made between language itself and its content, on the one hand, and the social implications and connotations of language on the other. For example, when the ungrammatical person uses a singular verb with a plural subject, or a wrong form of a past tense, *done* for *did*, *seen* for *saw*, or says *you was*, or *them men*, or does any one of the many regrettable things which the speaker on the popular level may unconcernedly do, these forms of language in themselves and regarded merely as linguistic phenomena cannot be stigmatized as coarse and offensive. Many of the forms of conventional cultivated speech have originated in exactly the same way, and even a cursory examination of the history of English inflections will show that our present

standard and simplified system has been the result of an extraordinarily violent and destructive treatment of older and more elaborate conventional uses. If *I done it* seems vulgar, therefore, this is not because of something inherently offensive in the mechanism of the words as a language process, and of course not in the thought, which is exactly the same as when the cultivated speaker says *I did it.* The vulgarity of the phrase, if it is present, must therefore arise from the associations and connotations of the words. A person who says *I done it* is obviously one heedless of or unaware of the conventions of cultivated speech. Not only his habits of speech but in all probability many of his other personal habits will be different from those of a more highly conventionalized society. These differences the conventional person may sum up by saying that the speech of the uncultivated speaker is vulgar. Yet certainly he must be a person of very tender susceptibility who should find differences of social custom coarse and offensive when these differences rest merely upon differences in conventional habit. Merely Popular English like this will not often be confused by sensible persons with Vulgar English. The former has not the stamp of approval of good cultivated use, but on its own level it gets along very well without it, and even when speakers from the popular and the general colloquial level meet and mix, satisfactory social intercourse through the forms of language is still humanly possible. In reality English is vulgar only when it expresses facts or situations which in themselves are inherently offensive to good taste. The vulgarity is consequently not a vulgarity of language primarily, but a vulgarity of content. The proprieties — to say nothing of the decencies — do not permit the

mentioning of various common bodily functions. The physical details of illnesses are not ordinarily considered proper subjects for polite conversation. The moisture of the body by many cultivated speakers is referred to only in euphemistic terms, like *perspiration*, since the blunt word *sweat* in their minds has become vulgar. Powerful odors are not pleasant either to experience or to talk about, and therefore the word *stink* has become a vulgar word, except in a few archaic and literary survivals, as in *stink to heaven*. Even the word *smell* is now going the same way as *stink*, and *emit an odor* or some other locution is often substituted for it. According to the canons accepted by many persons it is bad taste to discuss dreams in general conversation. Undoubtedly it is possible to carry these refinements of feeling too far, to insist that legs may only be referred to as nether limbs. The absurdities of excessive refinement, however, are no excuse for the disregard of the reasonable demands of taste and feeling, and the speech of the person who pays no heed to them may fairly be designated as vulgar. It is vulgar moreover not only in relation to the cultivated speech of the general colloquial level, but likewise in relation to the less sophisticated speech of the popular level.

Formal Colloquial English is the spoken language of the special occasion. Any moment, it is true, may suddenly become a special occasion. Even in casual conversation, a quick change of temperature, from cordial friendliness to a more chilling politeness, will be registered in an increase of formality. The evidences of this change appear on the physical side of language in the greater precision and clearness with which sounds and words are uttered. In more familiar colloquial discourse a greater share of the

task of securing intelligibility in language is left to sympathy, to that quick realization of the meaning intended which a close personal association produces almost of itself. In formal English much less is left to chance. The speaker or writer chooses his words more deliberately, phrases them more fully, and elaborates shades of thought which in casual conversation might be taken for granted. Hence the contractions and abbreviations so common in general colloquial speech tend to disappear in the formal style. The terms of expression which imply vivacity and warmth of feeling, the picturesque exaggerations of animated conversation are toned down and replaced by generalized terms less direct and personal in their values. The tone appropriate for addressing a large audience is formal because the speaker does not strive to establish immediate relations with individuals, but with groups of persons whose separate reactions cannot be gauged so certainly as when only two or three persons are conversing with each other. The public speaker aims at a larger target and at a greater distance, and hence the projectiles he uses must be of a kind suitable to this purpose. The speaker before a mixed general audience who addresses his public in a style appropriate to conversation takes an unfair advantage of them. They cannot answer back, as the appeal to personal interest gives them a right to do. They must take what he gives them, and what he says should be as applicable to one member of the audience as to another. The danger of the formal style is of course that it may be pushed to the extreme of pedantic formalism. The successful formal style cannot be lifeless, but at the same time it must avoid that intimate vivacity which has its rightful place only on the familiar colloquial level.

Literary English is not in all its details different from formal colloquial, or even popular speech. In fact, on all levels of English the forms of language which are common to all are probably more numerous than those which are peculiar to any one. The kinds or styles of expression are felt to be unlike not because there exist fundamental and all-embracing differences among them, but because each has its own peculiar top-dressing of details which provide the hints for establishing a definite attitude of mind. The details of the literary style differ less from those of formal colloquial English than from those appropriate to the general colloquial level. But here again one must note that literary styles vary greatly in the degree of their specific literary quality. The English language lacks an adjective to name this quality. The word "literatesque" has been suggested for this purpose and it would serve a useful end as providing a complementary term to the adjective "colloquial." The literary style is obviously a formal style, but the particular quality of the formal literary style is something peculiar to itself. A habit of mind lies back of it different from that which controls all colloquial styles. It is a manner of expression still less immediate and direct than the formal spoken style. An author often hesitates to write what he has no hesitation in saying, even if he is speaking before a large general audience. The cadence of the voice, a smile or the light of the eye may qualify what he speaks, but the written word cannot carry with it any of these interpretations. Italics and quotation marks are sometimes used to take the place of these aids, poor substitutes, however, for the spoken word.

The most distinctive qualities of literary style result

from its dependence upon literary tradition. The number of writers who have acquired skill on the literary level of expression without a preliminary and sedulous acquaintance with the work of other practitioners of the literary art is so small that it counts for nothing. Literature feeds upon literature. It addresses itself to living men and women, but in English literary expression, the ghosts of many dead authors also speak. Through centuries of discipline and experiment, an idiom has been developed that has its own moods and sanctions, more aloof from direct personal experience than any form of colloquial expression. A detailed examination of these marks of aloofness belongs to the rhetoric of literary expression, but a few may be given here as illustrations. For one thing, certain types of sentence structure appear more abundantly on the literary level than elsewhere. In spoken English, the complex sentence is used rarely, especially the complex sentence with two or three involuted relative clauses. All literary sentences are not elaborate, but balanced, suspended, antithetic, and complicated sentence structures flow freely from the pens of writers whose lips and tongues would stumble over such ingenuities if they attempted to speak them — whose hearers would be amused or bored if they heard them. Intentness on matters of structure enters the literary consciousness not only in the organization of sentences but likewise in the planning of the whole content of what the writer has to say. In conversation one cannot readily see the end, since the end is determined as much by the persons one is conversing with as by oneself. But in writing the whole situation is under the control of the writer. He may omit or expand, emphasize or tone down

wherever he will. Writing therefore demands more foresight than colloquial speech. In the latter, each speaker speaks as the spirit of the moment gives him utterance. In the former, the writer must determine what the spirit of the moment is or the spirit of the next moment is going to be before he can give it expression. All this circumspection takes form in what is known as the structure of literary composition.

Literary expression also possesses a vocabulary in many instances peculiar to itself. By numerical count, undoubtedly the words of the most exalted literary performance would for the most part be the same as those that would occur on any other level of English expression. The language of literature is not a language different from other forms of English, but only a specially colored adaptation of the common language. The number of words required to give this special coloring may not be very large. As a sprinkling of dialect words is sufficient to give an impression of dialect, so a sprinkling of literary words may produce the impression of a literary style. Peculiarly literary are those words which exist in the traditions of writing but which are rarely or never spoken. Thus *reply* or *respond* are literary as contrasted with *answer*, *return* as contrasted with *come back*, *devise* as contrasted with *plan*, *jest* as contrasted with *joke*, *remote* as contrasted with *distant*, *countless* as contrasted with *very many*, and so with other words almost without end. Literary words are often archaic or limited in use to special kinds of literary expression. So the language of poetry has many uses that survive only in poetry, not only forms like *thou dost*, *he speaketh*, but words like *eft*, *eve*, *o'er*, *whither*, *ne'er*, *fain*, *steed* for *horse*, *kine* for *cows*, *lass* for

girl, and many more. Modern poets often avoid using this poetic diction in the endeavor to make their style less traditionally poetic after the fashion of the older school of writers of verse. Even the most realistic of modern poets, however, is sure to employ certain words in associations which would occur only in literary expression. Manifestly there is nothing reprehensible in this cultivation of a literary vocabulary when the vocabulary is in the spirit of that literary tradition which gives its distinctive quality to all literary composition. Sins against good taste are as possible here, however, as elsewhere in the use of language. It is easy to overdo, easy to misapply the strong colors of the literary speech. And a cheap literary taste may be cultivated as well as a distinguished one, as in the newspaper exploitation of *ban* for *forbid*, *pact* for *agreement*, and in hosts of other instances of journalese.

The most important observation to be made with respect to these several levels of English speech is that no one of them implies a condemnation of the others. Each has its own right to existence, except perhaps the lowest level. As the distinctive speech of those who exhibit a brutal insensitiveness to the preferences, tastes, and feelings of others, little can be said in defense of Vulgar English. But life would certainly lose some of its charm if all forms of popular speech should pass out of existence. The conventions which prevail on the cultivated colloquial level are comfortable and save a great deal of trouble, yet are scarcely so authentic as to acquire the right to supersede all other customs of speech. Cultivated speech indeed continually restores and refreshes itself by imbibing some of the untroubled waters drawn from the well

of unsophisticated speech. That popular speech is a well of English pure and undefiled one might hesitate to say. Simple life and simple customs nevertheless often have a health-giving directness of a beneficent influence. In the matter of language, for example, they continually check the cultivated speech in its tendency to develop towards elaborate and bloodless refinement. These are justifications of popular English from the point of view of cultivated colloquial speech. But obviously from its own point of view, popular English calls for no justification. It meets adequately the needs in language of the speakers who employ it, and it provides in many ways a more perfect adaptation of speech to its environment than the English of any other level.

The justifications of English on the formal colloquial and on the literary level are self-evident. They are indeed easily exaggerated, owing to the common human tendency to lift rarified and impersonal aspirations to positions of exceptional authority. But just as the popular speech provides a corrective against excessive refinement in cultivated colloquial speech, so this latter in turn, like a magnet imbedded in the life-giving earth, always draws back to it the eccentricities of the formal and literary speech when they wander too far from the center. The special occasion must have its appropriate language, but a limited language, since the occasion is special. It is a language perhaps too good for human nature's daily food. Its goodness or badness, however, as a speech for all needs is beside the point, since no speech can be that. The conclusion one must come to, therefore, when one looks at English from the point of view of levels is that the first requirement of all English is that it shall

be appropriate to the circumstances that attend it. A very large element in establishing the goodness of any use of English must lie in a sensitive realization of the tone one wishes to maintain. Anyone who is aware of the levels of English speech and begins to learn how to keep them has gone a long way towards the mastery of good English. The categories here described are by no means exhaustive, and to carry them further should prove a helpful exercise in the understanding of the many adaptabilities of English speech in its varied living moments.

VII

THE DRIFT TOWARD REGULARITY

Since regularity implies order and system, it would seem at first thought that here, if anywhere in language, the notion of drift would be inapplicable. When one beholds the grammatical system of a language spread out neatly on the printed page, even the system of a language like Modern English, which has relatively little grammar of the traditional formal kind, one is filled with amaze at the picture of order in complexity which it exhibits. Paradigms and conjugations, parts of speech, subjects, predicates, and objects, these and the various other terms of grammar designate not merely single actions in speech, but large groups, each repeating the other with remarkable uniformity. How could such things be unless someone had made an orderly plan for them? How can we have regularity in language without a system, and how can we have a system without systematizers? The theological argument based on the notion of a design in nature would seem to apply even more convincingly as proving the existence of conscious design in language. A few repetitions one might explain as coincidences, but whole sequences of regular repetitions cannot be disposed of so easily.

Nevertheless, in spite of what seem like overwhelming appearances of intentional system in language, many other indications make it certain that for the most part the system of a language is the result of unconscious drift,

only in relatively slight degree of directed purpose. For one thing, we note that the descriptions of languages that have been set forth in systematic accounts of them have always been made long after the event, long after the system had evolved itself in the living practice of the language. Systematic grammars of English were not attempted, so far as anyone knows, before the seventeenth century. Chaucer wrote English without any formulated rules of English grammar to direct him, probably with only vague realization of the possibility of writing an English grammar, and there is no record of any grammar for the Anglo-Saxon period of the language when English was certainly as elaborate in its structural system, and perhaps quite as regular as it has been at any later time. The conclusion is unavoidable that the grammatical facts of a language are made at a time when there are no grammarians. The grammarians come after the work of the day is over, after the language has acquired its system. The grammarians discover what others have done, and having discovered it, they begin to write about it, often with such enthusiasm that before long they convince themselves that they have had a hand in creating that which they have only stumbled upon.

What is true of English and other languages with a literary tradition, is also true of languages that have never developed out of their simple colloquial stages. Many languages of uncivilized peoples have an extraordinarily complicated structural form, maintained with almost mechanical regularity in the speech of the societies in which they occur. But the speakers of these languages do not themselves know that their language is structurally complicated and regular, nor do they wittingly make any

effort to keep it so or to change it. They cannot describe their language to an outsider who may want to know about it. When the missionary and the philologist come among them and study their language, these outsiders discover by the simple method of observation what the regularities of the language are, and having put them down in orderly arrangement, these regularities become the rules, the system of the language. But the system was there all the time, long before the missionary or philologist began to take note of it, there also in spite of the fact that in all the long life of the savage tribe, probably not one person in the tribe had ever carried along a dozen consecutive thoughts on the form and the method of his language.

Moreover, the grammarian and the philologist, with all his interest in structural forms in language can do practically nothing to produce or to modify structural character in a developed language. He can describe the facts as they exist, but he cannot bring new facts into the organization of the language. He has the knowledge which might produce regularity, but not the power to use the knowledge. The primitive speaker of the language had no knowledge of grammatical structure or regular system, but he had nevertheless the power to produce these things. In Modern English, for example, any directive effort that might be expended upon the language must be applied to some comparatively few and unimportant details, that is, unimportant from the point of view of the whole structure of the language, such as *these kind*, *It is me*, and improprieties like *I seen him*, *them boys*, and other minor points of usage. But the body and framework of the regular habits of the language is something given, something so complete in itself that the reforming gram-

marian never thinks of meddling with it. What he does is to putty and plaster a little among the cracks in the surface ornamentation of the structure, like one who labors over the chips and scratches on the weather-worn gargoyle of a cathedral for fear the whole building may collapse. The main body of the structural habits of a language is formed at a time when the speakers of the language were heedless of such matters. A later generation, however, takes these regularized habits, and calling them its precious heritage, it canonizes them and enshrines them in the fair structure of a grammatical system.

In that early stage of the development of a language in which its structural character was determined, the common human impulse towards imitation undoubtedly played an important part. This imitation in the beginning may have been unconscious and instinctive, though very soon parents must have encouraged their offspring to imitate in particular directions. One would expect, moreover, that in the early periods of every language the imitation would be in many respects imperfect, that there was a great deal of fumbling in the growing processes of language. But repetition makes for definiteness, especially when repetition is carried along from generation to generation in what thus comes to be established as tradition. In the end it is conceivable that a language might become so highly developed in a traditional form that no new acts of invention would be required or permitted. In that case the developed language would merely be passed on from one generation to the next as a fixed cultural inheritance. This would be possible, however, only if the general social character of the group of persons who spoke the language remained

undisturbed. If conditions changed, if aliens entered the social body, for example, speaking a different language, or if the whole group moved into new social surroundings or any person in the group, then the process of instinctive imitation would in all probability become active again.

Nor can it be supposed that this kind of instinctive imitation existed only in the very early chronological periods of a language. It can still be observed in the fluctuations of the English language today. A person who habitually speaks one type of English, say the conventionally correct English of educated conversation, will very readily drift into another kind if a change of circumstances makes it easy for him to form new imitative habits. If he leaves an educated society and becomes one in an uneducated society, within a short time in all probability he will speak the language of the uneducated society. In other words his instinct towards imitation will cause him to adopt a new system of language which brings him into closer harmony with his new surroundings. Only a determined resolution on his part not to be assimilated could prevent the influence of his new surroundings. Probably every observer of speech can recall instances of educated speakers who, as the saying is, have lapsed from their correct habits and have accepted the habits of some provincial or illiterate type of speech. But the reverse occurs more frequently and even more readily. An uncultivated habit of speech is often replaced, sometimes with surprising quickness, when the speaker changes from an uncultivated to a cultivated surrounding. Or one form of cultivated speech may be speedily replaced through this process of instinctive imitation by another,

perhaps more highly esteemed cultivated speech. Westerners, for example, after a year or two of living in the East often cannot be distinguished from Easterners in their speech. This kind of assimilation is of course often assisted by the desire of the Westerners not to be taken for Westerners, that is, by their desire to become harmonious members of their new group. When such a desire is present it merely provides a favorable atmosphere in which new imitative habits of speech may flourish. It has often been observed likewise that Americans who have lived a year or two in England, Rhodes scholars for example, often come back speaking like Englishmen. Perhaps in England and by natives of England they would not be mistaken for Englishmen, but in America they might easily be so mistaken. Nor is this new speech always to be charged against them as snobbishness. They may be snobbish about it, but if they had been merely natural and had associated sympathetically with Englishmen for several years, inevitably their speech would have been colored by their surroundings, with no effort on their part.

Though imitation does well enough as a general term applying to the tendency of speakers in groups to become assimilated to each other, the term is by no means a complete description of the processes involved. In the first place, imitation in language is not merely a matter of language, of the repetition of words, pronunciations, and constructions. Speakers do not imitate each other as a parrot imitates the trainer who is trying to teach it to talk. Only the first efforts of the infant as it begins to form words are made in this manner. But this is such a rudimentary kind of imitation that "echo" would be a

better name for it. After much repetition the infant connects its echoes with meanings, and thus, by the association of sound and meaning, it comes into possession of a real word. In all this process, however, there is not likely to be much that is new, so far as the general character of the language which the infant is trying to acquire is concerned. The infant reproduces, it echoes the speech of its instructors as exactly as it can, and any discrepancies that may develop between the speech of the child and its parents are usually so slight that they escape the attention of the parents. Invention plays a very small part in the relations between parents and children during the period of the early acquisition of speech by the child, and therefore imitation is limited to the reproduction of forms of speech already present in the language.

As the child grows older, however, and as language takes on the character of fully developed and mature speech, the situation becomes more complicated. Language then becomes less and less a mere echo, and more and more an active adaptation on the part of the individual to the particular conditions by which he is surrounded. To describe this changed situation, one needs a broader term than imitation, a term which suggests a progressive concord between actions or situations and the language by which actions or situations are expressed. A good term for this purpose would be "harmonization," and the implications of this term are that as actions and situations are repeated, they establish themselves the more definitely, that is, the more satisfactorily and harmoniously, in forms of language. If we call actions and situations thoughts, then we might lay down the principle that languages, or rather the people who use a language, constantly strive

to establish a single expression for a single thought. The expression thus becomes a counterpart to the thought, a kind of short-hand symbol for the realization of the thought without much conscious examination or analysis of the thought. As an old shoe fits the foot or an old glove fits the hand, so the expression becomes an easy and satisfying accompaniment of the situation for which it stands. In the process the thought itself may lose something in freshness and in sharpness of appeal, but it gains on the side of familiarity and certainty. The result is what is felt to be a harmonious blending of form and content.

This process of harmonization manifests itself in all the different aspects of language. Words, for example, do not acquire their established or regular meanings merely by logical definition. An attitude of mind establishes itself gradually in the experience of one or more individuals with respect to the thought to be expressed by a word, this attitude then passes from one person to another, and as the thought becomes more and more established and more general, the word acquires a more definitely realized and therefore more regular value. The meaning of the modern word *charity* will serve as an illustration. One of the most bitter battles of the Reformation in England was fought over the two words *charity* and *love*, the point being whether the two words meant the same thing and were therefore equally acceptable as a translation into English of the Greek word in the New Testament for which they were to stand, and which was taken to mean the Christian's love for his fellowmen. For this idea no satisfactory traditional English word was available in the sixteenth century. Even today no single satisfactory

word is available, the idea being perhaps too vague and idealistic to permit its being named by a simple, firmly apprehended term. But in the sixteenth century, theologians were earnestly seeking for such a term. Sir Thomas More defended *charity* as the better translation for Greek *agape*, and William Tindale argued in favor of *love*. Yet if two such learned men could be thus divided in opinion, the argument in favor of the one or the other of these words could not have been obvious and conclusive. At bottom Tindale and More were discussing not words, but attitudes of mind not yet fully discriminated, and in fact each makes out a very good case for his side. In the sixteenth century, the two words might very reasonably have been regarded as synonyms. No one today, however, would seriously propose *charity* and *love* as synonyms. The few survivals of *charity* in the older sense of *love*, as in the trio of Christian virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity, are archaisms, intelligible only to the person who knows something about ecclesiastical history. The word *charity* can no longer be used to name a general spiritual quality, but only a form of good works. Perhaps *love* is not altogether satisfactory either as a name for this spiritual quality, being now usually expanded into some such phrase as *love of mankind* or *love of one's fellowmen*, but the word *love* certainly carries more of the older meaning than *charity*. How has this differentiation and regularization in the meaning of the word *charity* been brought about? Manifestly not by any conviction that the term *charity* in itself was inadequate for the idea of Christian love, but by the practical necessities resulting from immediate experience. As the modern world has stressed more and more the applications of the Christian

virtue of love, so the word *charity* has tended to take over definitely the notion of the active exercise of love in the doing of good works, more specifically in giving gifts to the needy.

These two words *love* and *charity* illustrate the point that words acquire their meaning by being used, and that only as the actions and thoughts of men become definite and determined do the words which name these actions and thoughts become correspondingly precise and established in meaning. Our regularity in the use of words is not merely the result of an analysis of the logical content of the mind, but a harmony, one may say, between an expression and a repeated action. Things that we do again and again take on a clearly realized quality of their own and in the process attach to themselves words of corresponding values. A word like *charity*, therefore, acquires its meaning by accretion, rather than by definition. After a body of associations has surrounded the word, then it can be defined. The English language is full of words of this kind, in fact is composed of them. Often the result of this drift towards meaning has produced a word so strikingly different in content that the beginning and the end to the casual observer bear no relation to each other. Modern English *gossip*, *lord*, *lady*, *husband*, and hosts of other words, each contains in its etymology an elaborate story, clear enough as one looks back, though the future, as always, remains uncertain, and in the process of development of these words in the past, no one could have foretold how they would turn out.

When two different words of approximately equivalent meaning are permissible in the language, stylistic considerations are often brought in by those who concern them-

selves with questions of propriety to limit use to one or the other. For example, *anyway* and *anyhow* both have good dictionary authority, though purists often defend *anyway* as the only proper form, on theoretical grounds which really have little pertinency. So also *provided* and *providing* as conjunctions are both in general use, as in *You can do this, provided* or *providing you have official permission*, though here again now one and now the other of these two forms is rejected, mainly for the reason that one form for this single purpose is felt to be sufficient. Or of course both may be rejected on the ground that the meaning is adequately expressed by the more general *if*. The past tense of *show* is sometimes *showed*, sometimes *shown*, of *dive* is sometimes *dived*, sometimes *dove*, the past participle of *get* is sometimes *got*, and sometimes *gotten*, and so with a number of other verbs. Statistics on the relative frequency of the use of these double forms are not available, but if they were, they would probably show a marked tendency, varying in different groups and even in different applications, in favor of one form or the other. The number of these double forms is relatively small, however, and all of them are debatable. When the language is viewed historically, it becomes quite clear that there has been a constant drift towards regularity, towards the elimination of just such indifferent variabilities. This tendency is still present, though it is often obscured by arguments which have little relevancy. Thus the past participle *gotten* is often condemned as a vulgar Americanism, though in fact the uses of *gotten* are complicated and cannot be disposed of by any such sweeping accusation. All that is necessary, however, to arouse a feeling of antagonism towards a form of language

is to present two forms of the same content on the side of intelligibility. Almost invariably one or the other form will be rejected, and though a variety of reasons may be given for the decision that is made, the one least often given is the most influential, the feeling that for a single thought there should be and must be a single corresponding form in the language.

Sometimes this drift towards regularity in words is checked before complete regularity is attained. This can be seen in the three words *too*, *also*, and *likewise*, as in the sentences, *If everybody else is going, I am going too*, or *If everybody else is going, I am going also*, or *If everybody else is going, I am going likewise*. It would be a difficult undertaking to distinguish logically among the three adverbs as used in these three sentences. For all practical purposes, the three sentences have the same meaning, and the same dictionary definition would apply indifferently to the three adverbs in them. In fact the easiest way to define any one of these adverbs, in the sense in which they are here used, would be to cite the other two. Have we then here a situation in which a familiar and often repeated logical situation, that is a mental action, may be and is expressed indifferently in three different ways? Has common use through common experience failed here to settle upon a regularity, upon one of these words to correspond to what is felt as a single logical situation? On the contrary, the same tendency towards a harmony between single form and single thought is to be observed here as elsewhere in language. For although it is conceivable that the meaning intended might be expressed as it is in the second and third sentences given above, in reality the meaning would almost never be so expressed. The

words *also* and *likewise* scarcely exist in the spoken vocabulary even of educated men and women in the sense of *too*, still less in the vocabulary of children. They are formal and literary words, familiar to every person who reads, and more or less employed by every person who writes. But the tendency in the language is in the direction of reduction of these three forms to one in this aspect of meaning, and if this tendency were not checked by the conserving power of literary tradition, the word *too* in all probability would crowd the other two words out of existence. If this should happen, the language would be poorer in words, but not poorer in the expression of thought, since even with the three words only one thought is expressed. It would be an interesting inquiry to examine the English vocabulary in detail in this way to discover how much of it is superfluous, maintained by that respect for language as a precious heritage even when it is not expressively useful.

The drift towards regularity and uniformity illustrated in the foregoing remarks on vocabulary appears still more markedly in the common grammatical categories. One of the simplest and most useful of logical distinctions is that of number, and corresponding to this logical need, the English language possesses some appropriate grammatical forms. In Modern English only two aspects of number are treated as significant from the grammatical point of view, the singular and the plural. In the earlier periods of the Germanic languages, as in certain other languages, a dual was also formally recognized. Even the dual, however, does not exhaust the logical possibilities, and besides a singular for one, a dual for two, one might also have had a triple for three, a quadruple for four, and

so on to the limits of human endurance. English reached the limits of human endurance very quickly in reducing the grammatical numbers to two. In a way it is true to say that English has only one grammatical number, the plural, since a word in the singular number bears no mark to indicate that it refers to one object and only the plural may carry with it a distinguishing mark of the plural. The plural, therefore, with its clearly defined logical content and its corresponding grammatical indications provides an instructive body of linguistic detail in which to observe this process of drift towards regularity. The most casual examination shows that though the drift towards regularity in expressing the notion of plural number has been very powerful, it has not resulted in absolute uniformity. Besides the ordinary plurals in *s*, we also have plurals like *men*, foreign plurals like *data*, and even plurals without ending, like *sheep*. We note further that the regularizing tendency in the present time, so far as cultivated use is concerned, seems to be effectually held in restraint by the conservative tradition which strives to keep language as it was, to preserve the precious heritage intact. New words as they are brought into the language, however, always take their plurals in *s*, unless the influence of a foreign language is strongly felt, as in the instance of *data*, *differentiae*, and other learned plurals. Even plurals like these yield often to the common regularizing tendency, as in the plural *atoms*, and if one wanted to make an English plural for the noun *bonus*, the only possible plural would be *bonuses*. And as the student looks back over the history of English, he perceives that the tendency to reduce all plurals to the type of plurals with *s* brought about an almost complete reconstruction of this

grammatical characteristic at the time of the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English. That this development resulted from a reasoned conviction that it was desirable to have a uniform method for expressing the concept of plurality, no one can suppose. It resulted rather from the combined process of living, speaking, and thinking. The notion of plurality as it presented itself in the experiences of the real world tended to be expressed in the same form and thus to bring about a harmony between single concept and single expression.

A somewhat difficult situation presents itself, however, when the attempt is made to relate these general regularities or harmonies of language to individual actions in speech. We know that in the daily, practical use of speech we do not think of general laws unless a special necessity is present. When I say *Cats are gentler animals than dogs*, I use three plurals in *s*, but in making this remark, the thought that *s* is the regular mark of plurals in English is not present in my mind, either consciously or sub-consciously. In fact a child or uneducated person who did not know what the word "plural" meant would express the thought in the same way as anybody else. Each act of language at the moment of its performance is an individual act, designed to secure intelligibility, not to illustrate a grammatical law. But the question now arises, if the notion of regularity or general law does not exist within the linguistic act itself, where does it exist? Is language really composed of two parts, the language of direct communication, which might be called the natural language, and a supernatural language, existing in a world beyond individual action, and likewise controlling individual action, though the individuals themselves may not

be aware of the existence and power of this supernatural language?

Belief in the existence of a supernatural language is certainly not uncommon. When people begin to reflect about language, they readily convince themselves that the complicated and varying uses of daily speech are not the real language, but only imperfect human approximations to a more perfect and more stable real language which exists in a world beyond human limitations. If they are asked, however, where this world is and where language can exist besides in the minds of individuals, such theorists have no convincing answer to give. Their conviction of the existence of a supernatural language is indeed based upon faith, not upon reason, faith being called in to explain what they have not taken the trouble to examine from the point of view of common sense. On examination it will be found that all the characteristics of language, its most general regularities as well as its specific applications, can be satisfactorily accounted for without going beyond the mind of the individual. The notion of a life in language inherent in general society, and the still more abstract notion that language has a life of its own, as though language were a being or power or faculty existing in itself, are both creations of the common anthropomorphic tendency to explain what happens in man's inner world as having its counterpart and often its control in a better and less variable outer world which man fashions in his own image.

This notion of an external life in English is also expressed in the well-worn phrase *the genius of the language*. The genius of the language is supposed to be a kind of tutelary deity whose will, once divined, becomes the law of the

language for all right-thinking persons. The genius of the language, it should be noted, is usually invoked to justify a prohibition, not to support what one wishes to do. What is regarded as contrary to an approved practice is said to be contrary to the genius of the language. Nor can the genius of the language very well be called in to account for what has happened in the course of the history of the language. Was it in harmony with the genius of the language that the English inflectional system should be revolutionized during the Middle English and early Modern English periods, and is it now contrary to the genius of the language to simplify further the English inflectional system? Or were the uproarious innovators of the sixteenth century listening to the voice of the genius of the English language when they enriched the English vocabulary with borrowed finery from Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and any other possible source, and do now our modern defenders of the faith obey the same voice when they battle for the purity of our precious heritage? Or must we conclude that the genius of the language is a very reasonable sort of creature who knows how to bow to the inevitable and who takes to her bosom any upstart adventurer in language after his work is once definitely accomplished? Certainly when one looks back at the extraordinarily subversive and radical things that have been done during the past history of English, it does not seem that the genius of the language could very seriously object to anything that might be done in the future.

But if there is such a thing as the genius of the language, one is bound to consider where this genius dwells. As we know things in this world, even the most refined spirit must have a body to contain it. The genius of the

language, it may be answered, resides in the language as a whole. But where does the language as a whole reside? Scarcely in the grammar and the dictionary, for these are but dead echoes, and the genius of the language must dwell in a living body. This brings us back again to the individual, since the only place in which language as a living activity can exist is the human mind as it is engaged in the processes of living speech. We thus conclude that the genius of the language exists not in any external world of spirits, not in any supernatural dehumanized language, but only in the minds of speaking, writing, thinking individuals, and that, therefore, so far as it exists at all, it must be a part of very general human experience. It seems that it is in fact very much the same thing as what is called *esprit de corps*. Language consists not merely of the acts of individuals but also of the interactions of individuals in their relations to each other in groups. These interactions as they tend to move forward in definite directions and thus to produce regularities, harmonies, laws, whatever one wishes to call them, are the *esprit de corps*, the genius of the language.

The relation of the individual to the whole group, of the single act in language to the sequence of acts which results in a regularity or law, perhaps may be indicated most briefly in the language of metaphor. The individual in a speech group is like a link in a chain. Each link is a unit, but with his two hands each living link joins with others on either side, who in turn join with others, and so the chain grows, link after link, each a part of the whole but each connecting directly only with his right and left neighbor. Each link is aware of himself, but the link near the one end may be utterly unaware of the existence of

the links near the other end. But this figure is inadequate in that two hands permit only two points of connection in a chain. Imagine, however, that the mind has hands, a hundred or more of them, as many as it needs. When a speaker addresses an audience, he holds out as many hands as there are auditors, and he becomes a link in as many chains as there are mental hands that clasp his own. The hands of the mind take hold and let go quickly and easily. They are continually forming new chains or joining old chains at different places, fashioning in the end such a network of linkings that no human mind could ever fully set forth the work its many hands have been at. Some of these workings, however, are revealed to the contemplative soul. Whenever a link in a linguistic chain stops to reflect and look about him, he becomes aware of the fact that he is not merely a unit but besides a link in a linguistic chain, in a thousand linguistic chains. If he follows one of these chains along from link to link, he will arrive in time at a generalization, a regularity, a law of the language, the rule, for example, that plural subjects take plural verbs, or that nouns form their plurals in *s*, or that *charity* means the giving of alms, or some other of the almost numberless regularities of the language. Having made an observation of this kind, he will probably be delighted. He will feel that a chain with so many links in it must be a good one, and he will feel also that his knowledge of the existence of the chain as a whole has made his connection as a link stronger. This is the ordinary process by which propriety, correctness, good grammar, style, in short, the genius of the language is established. On the other hand when the link casts his eye up and down the length of the chain, he may be

horrified to find what company he is in. He will then quickly unclasp the hands of his mind and hasten to join himself to other chains in which he feels that he can play the part of a self-respecting link.

If we examine the growth of regularity in language in the ways that have just been discussed, we shall be the better prepared to estimate the value of regularity as an element in living speech. The statement is often made that it is proper to insist on formulated regularity in language in the interest of intelligibility, that if we did not have uniform rules of procedure to direct us, we should all soon be struggling in an appalling confusion of misunderstanding. But certainly this did not happen in those older days when people spoke without the help of grammars and rules to direct them. Nor can it be said that bad grammar often results in unintelligibility. It may result in a dis-harmony, but not often in unintelligibility. The sentences *I seen him* and *I saw him* express the same meaning and would be correctly understood, so far as the logical content of the words is concerned, by all persons who heard them. Yet a stenographer who applied for a position and wrote *I seen him* would in all probability not secure the position. Our modern world imposes a heavy penalty upon the person who fails to accommodate himself or herself to the customs of speech which the modern world has agreed to accept as regular. In reality, however, this demand does not spring from a fear of unintelligibility but from something quite different. It springs from that insistent tendency to crystallize a single form for a single content which runs through all language. And though this tendency does not necessarily make for intelligibility in the broad sense, it does

make for quickness of recognition. What is expressed in the expected form is quickly grasped. The constant drift in the practical, everyday uses of language is in the direction of uniformity, of the expected, of the quickly intelligible. This implies obviously a check upon individual variation which develops into a tyrannical restraint upon individual expressiveness when the demand for uniformity becomes too exacting. This point can be reached, however, only when a real need for individual expressiveness arises. For the most part the simpler forms of language are indifferent. It does not greatly matter, so far as the mere logic of the statement goes, whether we say *I seen him* or *I saw him.* Since the forms of statement are indifferent, it might seem that a liberal attitude towards language would permit and justify the use of both forms indifferently. But it is just here that the principle of economy and harmony in language enters which demands, other things being equal, a single form for a single content.

Certain other applications and social values which have been attached to the drift towards regularity within the modern period of English call for a moment's notice. Some of these developments are so recent that they fall under the notice of every observant person. An older generation is still living whose speech is much less normalized and regularized than the speech of the younger generation on the same general level of cultivation. The older generation had less "schooling," that is, less discipline, than the younger in those matters of speech to which the schools today attach so much importance. As links they were less aware of their places in linguistic chains. A hundred years ago, even respected and dignified mem-

bers of society, men of importance in every community activity, were often men whose literary accomplishments would shame a high school graduate of today. Everybody knows that the Father of Our Country was a poor speller and a very imperfect grammarian. Imagine the ridicule that would greet a chief executive today who habitually misspelled or mis-punctuated, and who wrote sentences that would not parse! Nor was the charity with which these weaknesses in Washington were viewed due to the fact that he was no worse than anybody else. On the contrary, men like John Adams and Thomas Jefferson wrote and spoke correctly, according to the canons of their day, and were intent students of propriety in expression. The difference between that day and ours is that propriety had not yet become a universal requirement in the degree to which it has since become. And if we go back a little further in time, we perceive that the whole matter of conventions and rules of propriety in English as a general prescription was of relatively recent origin. In the Middle English period cultivated speakers and writers were by no means uniform in their use of English, not merely with respect to each other, but each in his own individual practices. Shakspere must have known little about rules of correctness. Doubtless he would have been willing to follow the rules if they had been formulated, but in his time the language had not yet been systematized and regularized with the rigidity that was soon to appear in it during the century or two following Shakspere's death. It was not until the eighteenth century that the grammarians, dictionary makers, and pronunciation experts began to take the English language seriously in hand. That these grammarians actually made the uses of the

language uniform and regular by their own will and power, that they dogmatically imposed a system of regularity upon the language, cannot be supposed. Grammarians at no time are likely to have any such determining powers. Like everybody else, the grammarians also were the children of their generation, and the rise of the grammarians to importance was made possible only because there was some support in the general social background of the life of their times which made their existence possible.

In general it would seem that there are two contrasting attitudes of mind that might make for regularity in language, one an aristocratic, the other a democratizing tendency. The aristocratic attitude would show itself in the development of a standardized language for use in a special class, which was in the England of the eighteenth century primarily a literary class. This was the attitude which resulted in the classicism of the great writers of this period, of Dryden, as a forerunner, of Pope, Johnson, and hosts of others in the great flowering period of English classicism. The prevailing impulse of writers and theorists at this time was not to produce a language which should be accessible and uniform for everybody, but one which should be the distinctive possession of the scholar and the man of the polite world. To a very large extent, they formulated the canons and practices of English which later generations were to receive as their precious heritage. That this classicizing tendency often went to the extreme of excessive and artificial formalism, every student of English literature knows, and also that it prepared the way for a revolt against the conventions it had established at the end of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth century.

Although this aristocratic and classicizing tendency produced a lasting effect upon English, especially in fixing the traditional forms of the literary language, it did not establish itself as the final determining influence for all later attitudes towards the language. English today in its conventionally acceptable forms is not primarily an authorized literary language for an exclusive class, but a language for the whole people. This democratizing tendency in the treatment of language also strongly manifested itself in the eighteenth century, being in part a natural accompaniment of the philosophical liberalism of the time, partly the result of the rise of new protestant religious sects with a membership drawn largely from popular sources, partly also a consequence of economic developments in which a new middle class acquired wealth and social dignity. The development of printing and publishing was also a significant element in this movement. For these different reasons, general education became of greater importance than it had ever been before. During the medieval period, education was the privilege of the cleric, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it was the ornament of the scholar, but now, as the result of these great popular movements, it became more and more the demand of average citizens whose likes in the generations preceding never troubled themselves over such matters as reading and writing. As the citizen rose in the social scale, he appropriated to himself the privileges which hitherto had pertained only to special classes, political power for one thing, the comforts and luxuries of living for another, and not least, those distinctions of propriety and convention in language to which the culture of the men of letters had given a very real

social value. In the further development of democratic institutions, these impulses were strengthened, with the result that in a country like ours, it is now assumed almost without question that every citizen has the right to a liberal education, the right to know how to speak and write in ways which will make him the equal in this respect of every other citizen.

In our present inquiry, however, the important point is to determine just what we mean by a liberal education in language, just what has been the result of the drift towards regularity in this democratizing movement in English, and just how American citizens can enjoy equal possession of the English language. If we examine the procedure in the schools, in which this movement has taken its most obvious formal expression, we find that the effort of teaching is directed first towards securing uniformity in spelling, second towards securing uniformity or correctness in grammar and sentence structure, and third towards securing uniformity or correctness in pronunciation. In other words the democratic demand in education in English expends its energies on three of the simplest and most elementary aspects of language, on matters which have relatively little to do with either intelligibility or expressiveness, but which are, from their nature, easily reduced to formal, mechanical, systematic statements. That correctness in spelling or grammar or pronunciation exhausts the fundamental and essential purposes for which language exists no intelligent student of language will maintain. Such accomplishments in language are merely the external conveniences, the formalities which a highly organized society now imposes upon its members as a matter of course. The virtues they have are of relatively

low order, even though the conventions themselves are necessities. The danger in these simple democratic harmonies is that they may be taken to be final ends in themselves and thus may divert attention from better things. The citizen who spells correctly, writes a decent sentence, and pronounces acceptably may still be the crudest beginner in the realization of the expressive possibilities of language. He may pass as the equal of every other citizen, but only so long as the standards of the whole group are estimated on the same scale as that by which the merits of his own use of English are measured. It is easy to see that any rules of conformity or harmony which are to be made applicable to the whole social body, under the present conditions of society, must be of a relatively simple, elementary character, of a kind also that can be made readily comprehensible even by the dull mind. Uniformity in speech is also exploited as a symbol and measure of democracy because it appeals as one of the cheapest ways of sharing a common possession. Stocks and bonds and land and family honors are held tenaciously as private possessions by persons who are quite willing to permit all citizens to share equally in our precious heritage of language. Language may be a precious heritage, but it is not commonly considered to be as precious as a good many other things. Perhaps in this the holders of stocks and bonds and land and family honors are guilty of a certain short-sightedness, if it is their desire to retain their property for themselves and their heirs forever. For it seems clear from the evidence of the past that a people which has assimilated the elements of the intellectual heritage of the race will not long delay to

demand what it regards as its full share of material and social prosperity.

Our modern scheme of a liberal education in English for everybody hits the mark, if it does so, only by making the mark comparatively easy to hit. Yet teachers and others actively engaged in the endeavor to spread this uniform, liberal education in English are not much inclined to regard the mark as any too easy to hit. They point to the long struggling years required to make the youth of the land spell, write, and speak only passably well. But the value of no achievement is to be measured by the difficulty of it. It may be hard to teach everybody to spell correctly, but the fact that it is hard is no proof that it is supremely worth doing. It would probably be just as hard to teach everybody to turn a handspring gracefully. The practical conclusion to be drawn from the difficulty of bringing about uniformity in the elements of English is that these elements should be simplified and regularized as much as possible before they are made a universal requirement. They should be made so simple that there would be no virtue in acquiring command over them. In English we are at present trying to do two contradictory things — to maintain a traditional system, a precious heritage in English spelling, grammar, and pronunciation which is confusingly complex and irregular, and to impose this system upon a public certainly not interested in such a system and poorly prepared to assimilate it.

Granting, however, that the difficulties of the democratic program of a liberal education in English for everybody are surmountable, even with English as it is, how

much would be accomplished by it? The answer is that if fully carried out, it could do no more than prepare the way for the genuinely expressive use of English. It could provide equality of opportunity, by no means equality, or even assurance, of achievement. The three cherished guarantees of our government are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The right to live no one would readily relinquish, though the civilization that had gone no further than to assure the right to live could not be said to have advanced very far. Liberty also is a qualified privilege in a democratic society, being best defined as the right to do what under the circumstances seems practicable. In the same way, the third of these guarantees promises nothing except a qualified opportunity. It asserts only the right of the pursuit of happiness — let him catch it who can. In short, these guarantees merely clear the ground of obstructions by giving the citizen as free a field for the exercise of his energies as the circumstances permit. And the teaching of a uniform system of the elements of speech does very much the same thing in English. It removes the handicaps which the person might suffer under who never had the opportunity to take these first steps towards a genuinely expressive command over English. They remain nevertheless very rudimentary first steps. If every man, woman, and child in America could be taught to spell, write, and speak correctly, that is, regularly, this achievement in itself would be nothing to be proud of. It would mean merely that every man, woman, and child had been provided with the same practical implement of expression, but the value of the achievement could be determined only by the use to which this implement was put. That we are still

laboring at the uncompleted task of directing first steps shows how difficult of realization any more ambitious program of democratic education in English would be. Sufficient unto the day, however, is the labor thereof, and humble though it be, the endeavor to secure uniformity in the elements of popular speech presents itself as the inescapable consequence of the drift towards regularity in our day and generation.

VIII

CORRECTNESS

In the preceding chapters the English language has been discussed from the most comprehensive point of view. It has been described first as the language of the English speaking peoples. It was then pointed out that this English language which is characteristic of the English speaking peoples as a whole is nevertheless broken up into a great number of smaller languages or dialects. The next point was that popularly dialects are thought of as fluctuating and inferior forms of speech, measured and condemned in comparison with some supposedly unvarying and superior form of the speech. But it was then shown that no such absolute or single form of the speech exists or ever has existed. In the final analysis, since no two persons can speak exactly alike, every person speaks a dialect. We can think of two persons as speaking alike only when, for the sake of harmony, we agree to overlook the differences between them as unimportant. And from this arises the principle that the broad test by which we determine any form of language to be English is that we include it within our circle of linguistic sympathy. We know a word or a construction to be English when we feel it to be a part of our great mother tongue. But our sympathies are not always the same at every moment, and we accept or reject each individual occasion in speech in relation to its own circumstances, that is, on the level of speech to which it appropriately belongs. And finally

in the discussion of the drift of regularity the point was made that much that seems like reasoned order in language is merely the result of instinctive adaptation in the interests of social harmony, often a blind and stultifying social harmony. From these general considerations, we pass now to the more limited, but by no means unimportant question of correctness in speech.

If all persons acted at all times in exactly the same way, the question of correctness and incorrectness would never arise. Only when men differ in their thoughts and their actions do doubts and uncertainty arise. This is no less true in language than in the other perplexities of daily life. Even in the use of our familiar native tongue, our sympathies and our judgments are often divided. The fact of diversity in speech naturally gives rise to many uncertainties and difficulties in the practical use of the language. When several things are possible, it is necessary to make a choice among them. And so in speech, every person from time to time is confronted with the problem of choosing just those practices which he thinks he wants to follow and of rejecting those practices which he thinks should be discarded. This process goes on to a great extent instinctively, but with the more critical it is also a conscious process. With these latter users of the language, various aids are called in to help in arriving at decisions, and among these aids none is more commonly employed than the notion of correctness. Our next task shall be, therefore, to examine just what is meant by this idea of correctness as applied to the use of the English language, and to estimate just what its value is as a guide in the practical use of the language.

From what has already been said, it is apparent that

English may be English, and yet not be correct English. For both correct and incorrect English are constituent elements in the whole of the English language. A person who says *Them pipes is too short* is unquestionably speaking English. But it is true also that in by far the greater part of our use of the English language, the question of correctness or incorrectness never arises at all. We speak and we write in the main from instinctive habit. These habits are formed by long practice and experience and have become second nature to us. We do not therefore speak and write according to rule or law or theory, but for the most part we speak and write as the spirit within us gives us utterance. In the beginning, when we were infants, we were told to do this and to do that, and we were trained by our elders in what our elders thought were the correct habits of speech. But even so we made no conscious choices, and our elders probably made very few. They were intent merely in passing on the body of instinctive speech habits which they themselves had acquired by submissive obedience to the same kind of discipline that now in turn they were exemplifying with their children. Speech that is acquired in this way is almost like the natural bodily functions of breathing or of muscular motion. These acts of speech are performed without question, just as one breathes or moves the hands or feet without asking whether or not one is doing these things correctly.

Questions of correctness in speech are therefore on the whole relatively infrequent, and they arise only when there is present the possibility or the fear of incorrectness. If this possibility or this fear is not present, we go ahead without doubt or hesitation, following no other guide than

those instinctive habits which give us our foundation feeling of security in the use of our native tongue.

But though they are relatively infrequent, questions of correctness do arise. They appear in those situations in which the judgment must be called into play in order to make a reasonable choice between two possible courses of action in speech. And since they call for an act of judgment, they can come only relatively late in the process of acquiring the language. A child not yet arrived at the age of judgment could not be expected to comprehend the nature of the problem involved in the notion of correct and incorrect speech. If any special habits are to be inculcated in the child, the choices must be made by the child's elders. And of course even adult persons may remain in the state of children, so far as this particular matter of the exercise of judgment in speech is concerned. They may speak only as their spirit gives them utterance. Their words may come always as a direct and immediate echo of their thoughts and their feelings. But such persons are the fortunate few. Most persons of experience in the world are made to realize from time to time the differences in the instinctive speech habits of different individuals and are thus compelled to choose for themselves among a variety of conflicting possibilities. What they choose to do would naturally be what they consider to be correct, and what they reject, they would regard as incorrect. What are now some of the broad general principles upon which the decision of this question of correctness or incorrectness is made?

One principle might be that English is correct when it satisfies the purpose for which language exists. At first thought this sounds convincing. What more could be

asked of any human action than that it should realize the purpose of the action? And yet a little reflection shows that this principle is altogether too wide. One purpose of language, it may safely be said, is the adequate and satisfactory expression of thought. But when a laborer says *Them pipes is too short*, no one has any doubt as to the meaning of these words. The meaning is adequately expressed. It may be objected, however, that when the laborer says *Them pipes is too short*, although the thought may be adequately expressed, it is not satisfactorily expressed. But satisfactorily to whom? To you and to me the thought may not be satisfactorily expressed, but to the laborer it is both adequately and satisfactorily expressed, and therefore by definition, it is correctly expressed.

Argument like this, however, cannot make the laborer's English correct. There is a flaw in the argument somewhere, and the flaw lies in the too great comprehensiveness of the statement that thought which is adequately and satisfactorily expressed is correctly expressed. The term "correctness" is evidently a term of narrower significance. The assurance of correctness is a special possession of the few. It indeed makes a kind of class distinction. The ungrammatical laborer does not have it, for though he may express himself adequately and satisfactorily, he does so in complete innocence of any notion of correctness and incorrectness. The notion of correctness belongs to a more sophisticated world.

Another principle determining correctness in English might be that English is correct when it conforms to the inherent laws of the language. In testing the value of this principle, obviously the first thing to do is to inquire what

the inherent laws of the language are, or if there are any such laws. But if such laws exist, certainly the way to discover them is not easy. No one has been able to state the inherent laws of the language, and as a practical guide, this notion of the inherent laws of the language has the very serious disqualification that such laws are not on record. Perhaps the rules of English grammar might be thought to be the statement of these laws. Indeed, the old-fashioned definition of English grammar does say that English grammar teaches how to speak and write the English language correctly. The detailed discussion of grammar must be deferred to a later part of this book, but for the present it will be sufficient to observe that the rules of grammar are not inherent in the sense that they express the necessary and absolute nature of the language. The rules of grammar are merely generalizations, statements of established harmonies or regularities, made by observing what speakers and writers of the language have done. But it cannot be said that the rules of grammar express the nature of language in the way that a chemical formula states the nature of a chemical compound. They are inherent only in the sense that all human actions are inherent in the human mind, and to express the inherent laws of the language would be practically equivalent to expressing the content of the human mind.

A third principle determining correctness might be that English is correct when it conforms to the common practice of the language. But this principle is like the first one mentioned in that it covers too much ground. For undoubtedly there are many practices common in the language that cannot be characterized as correct. In fact by the mere test of numbers, probably certain incor-

rect practices are more common than the correct forms. Probably more people say *ain't* than *isn't*, and for the past tense of *do*, more say *done* than *did*. And on the other hand, many practices which are not very common must still be accepted as correct. Authors with a highly individual style, as for example George Meredith or Walter Pater or Henry James, often use English that one might find it difficult to parallel elsewhere. Yet these authors were conscientious and competent masters of the English tongue. It would be absurd to characterize their English as incorrect merely because it is unusual. But the defect in this principle plainly lies in the word "common." If we substitute for the word "common," another word, for example, "approved," we shall come nearer to the grounds of distinction between correct and incorrect English.

Not finding firm ground elsewhere, we come then finally to this principle as determining correctness, that English is correct when it conforms to the theory which some person holds as to what the language ought to be, and of course it is incorrect when it fails to conform to this theory. The implications of this principle call for a moment's consideration. In the first place, correctness thus becomes a matter of opinion. Since it cannot be found as an absolute and inherent quality in the language, correctness must be found in the views which persons hold with respect to the language. And if correctness is a matter of opinion, then manifestly there may frequently be room for difference of opinion. Even persons who have the same general background of education and social relationships will differ in their opinions concerning certain details of the language. One for example will contend that only

somebody else's is permissible, while another will insist upon *somebody's else* as the correct form. The two words *anyway* and *anyhow* are accepted as equally correct by many persons, whereas others are assured that one is correct and the other incorrect. When such a difference of opinion exists, which of the opinions is really correct? Or can both be correct? Can two different forms of English speech be correct at one and the same time? But obviously if correctness in speech is an assurance resting upon the conformity of the speech to the opinions which the person who has the conviction of correctness holds with respect to what the speech ought to be, then there can be as many differing assurances as there are differing convictions and opinions. The one or the other of these differing opinions can be adjudged the more correct only as some person is persuaded that the one or the other opinion is based upon the more reasonable and more solid foundation. And in certain instances, some persons may be persuaded that the difference between two forms of speech are so insignificant as to be unworthy of notice, and in that case such a person would regard both uses as correct equally and at the same time. The words *anyway* and *anyhow* would be an illustration in point. Or a construction like *these kind*, on the ground that *kind* is in a way a collective noun and plural in feeling, may be as acceptable to some speakers as *this kind*. The only power that could make any particular form of speech necessarily correct in itself would be something inhering in the nature of the language. But we have already pointed out that no such determining forces are discoverable. The whole activity of speech as we can know it is made up, first of all, of the great body of instinctive

speech habits, and secondly and less importantly, of conscious regulations or judgments with respect to certain specific habits. For his instinctive speech habits no person is responsible and over them no person exerts control. They come as the consequence of long and repeated experience, and their particular character is determined by the human circumstances in which each person happens to be placed during the early years in which he acquires his mother tongue. But conscious regulations and judgments are different matters. Almost every person is compelled to make some of these regulations or judgments. Some persons make more than others, and certain speakers almost completely reconstruct their speech to bring it into accord with an approved model. Whatever changes or judgments of this kind are made, are made in the interests of correctness. We must now consider some of the grounds upon which these judgments are based for the purpose of placing upon them a reasonable valuation as elements in the life of the language. The assurance of correctness will ordinarily be found to rest upon an appeal to analogy, or to logic, or to etymology, or to authority, or finally to that diffused social force which may be best designated as the morals of speech. Each of these ideas must now be examined in turn in a chapter of its own.

IX

ANALOGY

As a process in the development of the English language, analogy has been of the greatest importance. The psychological conditions determining analogy in language are present in all human actions. They are, briefly, the common impulse of mankind to perform similar actions in similar ways by adapting a new action to an older one. When cars for railway trains were first built, they were made as much like wagons and carriages as possible. The first automobiles were also made like carriages, and even their names were analogical, for they were known as horseless carriages. The first experimenters in the constructing of aeroplanes, although they had no human exploit of this kind to follow as a model, nevertheless found in the flying of birds the analogy for their experimentations. The flight of man was thought of in terms of the winging of birds.

Analogy in language has not been quite so obvious as these imitative acts in the physical world, but it has operated in much the same way. The constructive elements out of which language is made are not very numerous, and in the building up of speech they are employed again and again. In the grammar of the English language it is customary to define eight of these constructive elements, known as the eight parts of speech. But these eight parts of speech are not all equally significant from the structural point of view. The inter-

jection, for example, is of very slight importance, and the adjective is less important than the noun, the adverb than the verb, the conjunction than the preposition. Within their several groups, and especially in those groups that are functionally important in constructing the sentence, there has been in the history of the language a very marked tendency to make the words of the language conform to the same type. The nouns, for example, which perform one very important function, have tended also to take on one form, have tended towards greater and greater regularity. They have thereby acquired certain marks which, repeated in practically all nouns, have become the distinguishing characteristics of nouns. Thus in Modern English the surest way of testing whether a noun is a noun would be to make a plural of it by adding *s*. This has become the almost universal analogical mark of the noun. The word *stone* may be either an adjective, as in *a stone house*, or a verb, as in *to stone a cat*, or a noun, as in *to throw a stone*. But only one of these functions carries with it the possibility of adding the idea of plurality to the word by the appending of an *s*.

So also the verb, the second important functional element in the language, has appropriated to itself certain peculiar marks which have tended to become distinguishing for all verbs. When the characteristic verbal functions of verbs are expressed in the language, the tendency is always to express them in the same way. Perhaps the most important single function of verbs, apart from the fundamental logical idea of action, is the expression of tense. For this purpose the English language uses prevailingly the ending *d* or *ed*, and one of the surest ways of telling whether a word is a verb or not would be to see if

a past tense can be made for it by adding *d* or *ed*. If one wanted to make a new verb out of a word that had never been used as a verb before, one would make the past tense of this verb by adding *d* or *ed*. Just as the making of plurals by the adding of *s* is the most general analogical characteristic of nouns, so then the making of past tenses by the addition of *d* or *ed* is the most general analogical characteristic of verbs.

But the curious thing about these orderly habits of analogy in the language is that though they have moved generally in the direction of uniformity, they have always stopped short of complete uniformity. Most nouns form their plurals in *s* in English, but not all nouns do so. Some nouns make no change at all in the plural, like *sheep*, some nouns have no ending but instead have a change of the radical vowel, like *feet*, and there are still other irregular plurals, like *children* and *cherubim* and *alumni* and *phenomena* that call for special explanations. So also in the verb. The commonest way of making a past tense is to add *d* or *ed*, but the irregular verbs do not make their past tense in that way. Some verbs, like *went* for the past tense of *go*, even employ an entirely different word for the past tense. It would be just as easy to make a past tense *goed* as a past tense *hoed* or *showed*. And from the point of view of the general comfort and convenience of the language, and in the light also of the common human tendency as otherwise exhibited in analogy to perform similar actions in similar ways, it seems a little strange that the language has permitted these irregular and unusual forms to exist. It may seem even more than strange. It may seem untidy and reprehensible. Having started and carried well along an orderly and systematic

way of expressing plural number in nouns and past tense in verbs, why should not the language have continued the good work and have made all words expressing these functions of the language conform to the same type? And this query would apply not only to nouns and verbs, but it would be as much in point with reference to any other of the more or less regular habits of the language.

The answer to this question might carry one very far into the dark and mysterious recesses of human nature. Perhaps after all it is only the theoretical side of human nature that takes delight in a perfect system. Perhaps in the work and play of daily life, a certain amount of irregularity, of untidiness, and generous carelessness is more pleasing than a formal perfection would be. Leaving these general questions for private speculation, however, we may more profitably consider the bearings of analogy upon the matter of correctness in language. And the first conclusion we must come to is that analogy can have no compelling power in determining correctness. We have already pointed out that certain obvious analogical forms are not only not correct, but are emphatically incorrect. Thus a past tense of *go* as *goed* is common enough in children's English, and children in making this form follow a natural analogy. So also they make a plural *foots* or *sheeps* most reasonably and analogically, yet no person would give these forms the stamp of correctness, except the mad reformer who accepted as a principle of correctness the rule that analogy must be followed without hesitation or exception. But this principle would soon land one in manifest absurdity. It might be sound enough as a theoretical principle, but in language a rule that is not valid practically has very little meaning. To carry out

the principle of analogy systematically would result in an elaborate and revolutionary reform of the language. Such a reform may or may not be desirable, but in any case it has nothing to do with the determination of correctness in the language as we know it today and as we feel inclined to employ the English language in our daily lives.

A good set of forms in which to observe the operation of analogy in English, past and present, is provided by the adverb. In modern English the tendency is to make the ending *-ly* the characteristic mark of the adverb, and to extend this ending wherever possible to adverbs that historically were without it. Thus the ordinary statement of elementary English grammar is that the adverb ends in *-ly*, and the implication of this definition is that any words used functionally as adverbs without this ending *-ly* are to be viewed with disfavor and suspicion. And yet it is an obvious fact of experience in the language that *-ly* may be the ending either of an adjective or an adverb. In the title of the familiar hymn, *Lead Kindly Light*, the word *kindly* is an adjective, and expressions like *kindly thought*, *kindly action*, *friendly word*, *heavenly bodies*, *manly appearance*, *womanly conduct* are so numerous as to leave no manner of doubt that *-ly* is a common adjective ending. But what is the adverb corresponding to the adjectives *kindly*, *friendly*, *heavenly*, *manly*, *womanly*, and the other adjectives ending in *-ly?* In order to make adverbs of these adjectives must another *-ly* be added, giving *kindlily*, *friendlily*, *heavenlily*, *manlily*, *womanlily*, and so with the rest? This would be in accordance with the theory that an adverb must have its own distinctive *-ly* ending, and adverbs like *friendlily* and *kindlily* may occasionally be heard or read in the English of persons governed by

theory. Formerly they were more common than now and some examples will be found recorded in the New English Dictionary. But if *friendlily* and *kindlily* are just barely possible as English today, *heavenlily*, *manlily*, and *womanlily* are certainly impossible. If one wished to use adverb forms of these words, the only possible forms would be *heavenly*, *manly*, *womanly*. And in the current speech these words are thus used. Constructions like *He spoke kindly; How did he behave? Oh, very friendly*, are unquestionable idioms in present English. Likewise *heavenly* as an adverb has its place in somewhat familiar use, as in *That sounded heavenly*, but also in the more literary phrase *heavenly minded, earthly minded*. As for *manly* and *womanly* as adverbs, phrases like *manly behavior*, *womanly modesty* readily lead over to such constructions as *He behaved manly* or *She conducted herself womanly*. These two latter constructions would probably not be accepted by many students of the language as good English. *Friendly* and *kindly* as adverbs might pass, when *manly* and *womanly* would be rejected. But if *manly* and *womanly* are rejected as permissible adverbs, it could not be because they end in only one *-ly*. Some other reason must be discovered for the failure of *manly* and *womanly* to pass into unquestioned good use, and probably the reason is to be found in the fact that we have no strong impulse to use the words as adverbs at all. If the words were urgently needed as adverbs, undoubtedly the adverb forms would be *manly* and *womanly*.

In one of the best of Modern English dictionaries the statement is made that adjectives ending in *-ly* "have in ordinary use no corresponding adverb." This dictionary points out that down to the seventeenth century, an

adverbial *-ly* was added even to adjectives ending in *-ly*, but that these adverbs ending in *-lily* are now avoided as awkward, with the consequence that adjectives ending in *-ly* have no corresponding adverbs. But what would be said about *only?* As an adverb, *only* is common enough, and phrases like *only child*, *only instance* place it beyond question as adjective. The truth is that the attempt to insist upon the ending *-ly* as a necessary and peculiar mark of adverbial function carries the principle of analogy further than is justifiable. And if a word used as an adjective already ends in *-ly*, there is nothing in the history or the present use of the language to prevent that word from being used also as an adverb.

Another set of adverbs which are similarly branded as incorrect because they violate the principle that adverbs must end in *-ly* are those adverbs that have no endings. Adjectives of course are accepted quite freely as adjectives, even though they have no distinctive adjective ending. Thus words like *hard*, *soft*, *swift*, *slow*, *quick*, *fast*, *right*, *wrong*, and dozens of words like these, are never questioned as proper adjective forms. Yet when these words are used as adverbs in the same form they are often made subject to question and are often rejected as incorrect. Some of them to be sure may not have a form ending in *-ly*. If one wishes to use *hard* or *fast* as an adverb, the only possible way to do so is to use them in the undifferentiated adjective form, as in *Strike hard and often*, or *My watch runs fast.* When usage permits a form ending in *-ly*, however, the analogic theorist insists that the form in *-ly* is the only correct adverbial form. But in a sentence like *The blows fell thick and heavy*, it would be absurd to change *thick* to *thickly* or *heavy* to *heavily*. It

is almost a rule that when two adverbs come together in this way, they cannot end in *-ly*. Constructions like *The sailors pulled strong and steady, His pulse beat slow and feeble*, changed to *The sailors pulled strongly and steadily, His pulse beat slowly and feebly* would be in fact less in the spirit of English idiom and would be stylistically weaker. A sentence like *He answered right ten times and wrong five times* certainly is more simple and unaffected English than *He answered rightly ten times and wrongly five times*. And the word *slow* in the common road sign, *Go slow!* is unquestionably better idiom than when it is toned down to the theoretically correct analogical form *Go slowly!* If one were speaking of a time piece, the adverb *slow* would be the only form permitted by the idiom of the language. To say *This clock always runs slowly* would not adequately express the meaning intended. And when comparisons are added to adverbs, the form in *-ly* again would be contrary to the idiomatic use of the language. One might say *The soldier fired quickly*, but one cannot say *The soldier fired quickly as a wink*. And one may speak of something as coming swiftly, but not swiftly as the wind.

In short the idiomatic use of the language is clearly seen to depend on something more than mere conformity to a theoretical rule such as this analogical principle that adverbs must or ought to end in *-ly*. For the simple fact of experience in the language is that adverbs may end in *-ly* or they may not, as the practice of the language determines, and further, that to apply a rule of correctness mechanically to the language takes the language out of the possession of the vast army of the English speaking people, where it rightly belongs, and delivers it into the

hands of a few self-appointed language tinkers and reformers.

A backward glance at the history of these adverb constructions will help to keep them in order and will also help to explain why in present English so great a variety of forms is now possible. The Modern English ending *-ly* is by origin a weakened survival of the Anglo-Saxon ending *-lic*. This ending in its unweakened form gives present English *like*, and the words *man-like* and *manly* are therefore etymologically the same. In Anglo-Saxon the ending *-lic* was exclusively an adjective ending, with the inflections and other syntactical characteristics of the adjective. When this Anglo-Saxon adjective ending *-lic* became in the normal phonetic development of the language the ending *-ly*, it gave such forms as *only*, *friendly*, and others, as adjectives. Now for the adverbs. The common method of forming adverbs in Anglo-Saxon was by adding the dative ending *-e* to adjectives. Thus the adjective *heard*, 'hard,' became an adverb when the final *-e* of the dative case was added, giving *hearde*. And so also with the adjectives ending in *-lic*. They also became adverbs when the dative inflection *e* was added. Thus the adjective *frēondlīc*, 'friendly,' became the adverb *frēondlīce*, 'friendly.' In the course of time, however, all the final inflectional syllables of Anglo-Saxon weakened and disappeared, and among them, all the dative *-e's* of the adverbs. The result was that when the dative *-e* of an adverb like *hearde* disappeared, the adverb became exactly the same in form as the adjective, and when the dative *-e* of *frēondlīce* disappeared, this adverb became the same in form as the adjective, and so they have remained to this day.

Already in Anglo-Saxon times, however, we can see the beginnings of an analogical tendency to make *-ly* the distinctive adverbial ending. For we find that a number of adjectives which did not originally end in *-lic*, nevertheless appear in adverbial forms with *-lice*. This means that a tendency was already present to make the *-lic* ending, the modern *-ly* ending, a part of the characteristic form of the adverb. This tendency with the passing of time has perhaps increased and grown stronger, but certainly not to the extent of producing complete regularity in the forms of the adverb or of justifying suspicions of incorrectness in those adverbs which do not conform to the analogical tendency.

The futility of looking to analogy as a general guide to correctness is still more strikingly apparent when one examines English spelling and English pronunciation. As the most mechanical features of language and therefore the least colored by thought and feeling, one might expect that spelling and pronunciation would come completely under the simplifying and systematizing control of analogy. On the contrary, the language exhibits no greater regard for tidiness in these respects than in others. The absurdities of English spelling are too well known to call for description or comment. Good historical explanations can be given for all the current anomalies of English spelling, and in so far they can be justified. But on the other hand, good reasons can be given why many of them should be changed, reasons based mainly on the gains in economy which would result in following analogy. Thus if the initial sound of *sigh*, *side*, *sign*, *sin*, *seen* and many other words is represented merely by *s*, exceptional words with *sc* like *scythe*, *scimitar*,

scissors, scene, might well be made to follow their example. Some of these very anomalies of spelling are indeed the result of the analogy of smaller emphatic groups. Thus the spelling *sc* of *scissors, scythe* has come into these words through the notion that they should be equated in some way with Latin *scindo,* with which they have no historical connections. So also the silent *s* in *island* came in through the analogy of French *isle,* from Latin *insula,* though the word *island* is not of French or Latin, but of purely native origin. Such analogies are often called false analogies. They were not false, however, in the intention of the Renascence scholars who introduced them into the language. The purpose of these scholars was to make English as much like Latin as possible, even in the mechanical details of spelling. According to modern scholarly standards, their reasoning was bad, yet their practice was powerful enough to secure the adoption of the anomalistic spellings. The modern reformer is able to bring forward very good reasons why *scythe* and *scissors* should be spelled without *c,* and *island* without *s,* but his practice, if he ventures to put these proposals into practice, has so far not had any appreciable effect upon the general use of the language. This does not mean that good reasons carry less weight than poor ones, but merely that the circumstances were propitious when the spellings *scythe, scissors,* and *island* were introduced into English, and that now, on the other hand, traditional habit in the spelling of English words is so firmly established that even good reasons for change cannot be made to prevail. In the future they may. The rationalist has at least ground for hope that faith in reason may some time become strong enough to counter-

balance the weight of habit, or rather to establish a reasonable instead of an unreasonable habit. Until this happens, however, he cannot appeal even to reasonable analogy as an authority for correctness in spelling. The authority must always be the established habit, whether based upon good or bad reasons.

The value of analogy as a principle of correctness in English spelling must be found, therefore, in something less far-reaching than the consistent application of reforms, even though reasonable. One must insist now, as ever, that a theory of correctness in language can have authority as determining practice only in the degree to which the theory is already in practice. A theory which is well founded will usually find some followers, but what gives it weight as an authority is not the soundness of the reasoning which underlies the theory, but the fact that it has met with favor in one degree or another in the practical use of speech. Thus a not inconsiderable number of writers of English, especially poets, have used the spelling *tho* for *though*, and in the extent to which it is used, the spelling *tho* has authority. But the person who spells *though* as *tho* is not compelled, or even impelled, to continue with other words; for example, he does not spell *dough* as *do*, though *do* for *dough* is just as reasonable as *tho* for *though*. So also one occasionally sees the spelling *thru* for *through* and *thot* for *thought*, especially in the propagandist literature of spelling reform, and by extension of the principle involved, *du* for *do* and *fot* for *fought*. Such analogies may lead one far, much farther indeed than anyone is likely to go, unless driven by the exactions of a theory. The moral obligation to carry out a theory of the reasonableness of which one is convinced may rest

heavily upon some persons. It is true that only by recognizing this obligation is change possible. No reasonable improvement in language could ever be made, that is, could ever have any correctness, unless someone first of all translated it from thought into action. It does not follow from this, however, that every ideal improvement should be entered upon immediately. In every project of reform, expediency must play a large part. One may say, therefore, with respect to analogy, that it has a qualified value as a rule of correctness in spelling in that reasonable analogies when expedient have the force of obligation on their side and should be followed.

Pronunciations are closely bound up with spellings, and the force of analogy in determining correctness of pronunciation is no greater than in determining correctness of spelling. The words *either*, *neither*, for example, are sometimes pronounced with the vowel sound of *receive*, sometimes with the vowel sound of *sleight*. Which of these is correct? But so far as the argument from analogy goes, both are correct, and if one is more correct than the other, it must be on other grounds than those of analogy.

The pronunciation of words of recent introduction is often unsettled and shifting as they change from foreign to native English associations. Thus the words *chauffeur* and *garage* are now indubitable English words in the language, but they are still changing under the influence of the prevailing analogies of English words. For one thing, English words ordinarily bear the stress on the first syllable, and so these words are often pronounced with stress on the first syllable. And the initial consonant of *chauffeur* having usually the sound as found in *church*,

and the accented vowel having usually the sound heard in *taunt*, the whole word is pronounced accordingly. So also *garage*, with stress on the first syllable and with the consonant of the second syllable as in *stage*, *age*, and other English words, becomes by the simple processes of analogy a new word. But of course these new analogical pronunciations of *chauffeur* and *garage* are not correct by any commonly accepted standards. They are current and have arisen among speakers who express their language impulses unreflectingly and who never trouble themselves about correctness. With such speakers analogy indicates the line of least resistance and is therefore followed. The more sophisticated speaker, however, knows that these words are French. He tries to retain as much as possible of the French pronunciation of them, and instead of following English analogies, he avoids them as incorrect. It is always possible, however, that popular analogical pronunciations, like the uneducated person's pronunciation of *chauffeur* and *garage*, will prevail. They may ultimately become so common that even the most highly educated will use them. But if this happens, it will not be because the popular pronunciations have become correct by reason of their analogical regularity. They will become correct by the simple process of becoming socially acceptable. This has indeed happened in many words now completely anglicized. The word *valet* used to be pronounced like a French word, but is now supposed to be more correct as pronounced with the stress on the first syllable and the final consonant sounded. And dozens of English words, words like *virtue*, *courage*, and others of French origin, were in the beginning pronounced with stress on the second syllable. Chaucer pronounced them

with stress on the first or the second syllable, as he felt inclined. But later generations have become more limited in their practice. We can now stress these words only on the first syllable. The analogies of English stress started this change, probably first among the simpler class of speakers, and the pressure of general imitation and acceptance later made it compulsory. And all the words of French origin ending in *-ant* have been similarly reconstructed in accordance with English analogies. Could anything seem more absurd from the French point of view than the English pronunciation of a word like *defiant?* When one observes what has happened in the earlier periods of the language, it does not seem improbable that *chauffeur* and *garage* will also be anglicized in pronunciation.

Our general conclusion is, therefore, that though analogy has been and still is a very powerful systematizing force in the development of the language, this force has been exerted with little reference to conscious impulses toward correctness. It has indeed been most effective on those lower levels of the speech where the thought of correctness or incorrectness does not arise. It has thus produced laws or rules of the language of very wide extent. On the other hand, analogy as a principle determining individual instances of correctness or incorrectness cannot be conclusive, for analogy can be made to justify uses which all speakers would regard as incorrect as readily as those which might be brought forward as correct. It follows therefore that no matter what the weight of analogy in favor of a particular usage may be, if the usage is not otherwise acceptable in the common practice of the language, if it has not the living feeling for native idiom back of it, then analogy counts for nothing.

X

ETYMOLOGY

THE term "etymology" has several different meanings. In the one most generally current, the word refers to the origins and derivations of words. Thus the etymology of the verb *transfer* is its origin from the two Latin elements represented by the two syllables of the English word. An etymological dictionary is a book which discusses the words of a language primarily from this point of view of their origins and derivations.

A second meaning of etymology is now less general and has become somewhat archaic. In this sense, etymology is one of the divisions of grammar, especially Latin grammar, and it refers particularly to that part of grammar which treats of the forms and inflections of words. The two main divisions of grammar in this conception would therefore be etymology, treating of the variations in the forms of individual words, and syntax, treating of words as they appear in a context for the expression of thought. Instead of the word "etymology" in this grammatical sense, however, the more modern custom prefers simply the term "inflections," or "accidence," or the more learned term "morphology." Morphology means the study of the forms of words, and parallel to this term the modern grammarian employs also the term "phonology," the study of the sounds of language. The three main divisions of the study of language would thus be designated as phonology, morphology, and syntax.

Neither of these two meanings, however, suggested the use of the word etymology as the title for this chapter. There is still a third sense of the term which may be called its philosophical sense, and this is the sense in which the word is here employed in the consideration of etymology and correctness. This third sense may be most readily approached by looking at the word from the point of view of the first meaning of the term "etymology." According to its linguistic derivation the word is made up of two Greek elements, the one meaning "truth," the other the source of the syllables *-logy*, that common suffix in English words of Greek origin, *psychology*, *geology* and so on, which means "branch of knowledge." The whole term may therefore be expanded as "the branch of knowledge which treats of truth." Now the quest of truth as revealed in the causes and principles of things has been most commonly regarded as the special province of philosophy, and if etymology is the branch of knowledge which treats of truth, it becomes thereby a philosophical subject.

The philosopher of the present day, however, does not think of his subject as being nothing more nor less than etymology, the pursuit of truth through the study of words. To find this philosophical aspect of etymology most fully presented, one must turn back to the beginnings of philosophy among the philosophers of ancient Greece. With the Greeks the main questions concerned with the origin and nature of language arose in the discussion of the meanings of words. In general there were two camps of opposing philosophers, one maintaining that words exist by nature and that there is a natural and necessary connection between words and the things which

they name, the other maintaining that words exist only by convention and that there is no real connection between the object named by a word and the word itself. According to this second view, a horse might just as well be called a man, or a man be called by the name for a horse. According to the first view, if we only knew the final truth about the word "horse" or the word "man," we should see then that they were absolutely and inescapably the proper words for the objects which they name.

This question seemed important to the Greeks because it was a part of their general search for truth, part of their science of philosophy. For if words exist by nature, that is, if the word is in itself a truthful record of the thing for which it stands because it is an essential part of the thing, then the truth of the various objects of thought and speech can be determined by knowing the meanings of the words that name them. Ultimate and final truth can thus be reached through the study of words, for the truth of the word and the truth of the object of thought would in the end be the same thing. The problem would be of course to find what the true form of a word is and to separate the true word from its untrue corruptions and contaminations.

The questions raised by these ideas of the natural and the conventional meanings of words are entertainingly discussed by Plato in his dialogue *Cratylus*. In this dialogue Plato, under the disguise of the character Socrates, seems to have taken a half way position between the naturalists and conventionalists. He gives a great many etymologies of words after the easy going fashion of the philosophers of the day, but Plato realized that wild guessing is not etymologizing. He gives four dif-

ferent explanations for the name Apollo, a word which he says has been regarded as hard and mysterious. Instead of finding it hard, Plato embarrasses his reader by presenting him with a choice of four etymologies. But obviously there could not be four ultimately true meanings of the name Apollo. Discussing another word, Plato gives an explanation and then adds, "This is a good notion, and to prevent any other getting into our head, let us go on to the next word." In all this Plato seems to be ridiculing the reckless and fantastic etymologizing of his time. Nevertheless he seems to have believed in a necessary connection between words and the objects named by them, and he devotes a considerable part of his dialogue to showing how this connection could exist. He expressed likewise the belief that many words which originally expressed clearly the objects of thought for which they stood, that is, which originally existed by nature, became obscured by time and thus named their objects only by convention. The task of the philosopher was to see beyond this obscuration to the harmony which existed in the primitive identity of word and thought.

It may seem that these discussions of the ancient world are very far removed from the practicalities of living English today. But in reality the questions involved still have an important bearing upon language. We do not think now of etymology as the branch of knowledge which shall reveal the truth of all things, but the problem of determining the right meanings of words is still with us. When in doubt, how shall we know what a word ought to mean? And is it possible to assume that a word has a necessary and inherent meaning, the discovery of which will remove all doubt both concerning

the word and concerning the idea for which the word stands? And does a word then mean what it means, or does it mean what an appeal to its origins shows it might mean? Where shall we look to find the meaning and the truth of words?

These questions that have just been asked may all be reduced to one, and this one question is, whether the language in its immediate and present uses can justify itself by its own content, or whether the truth of the language, its genuine proprieties and correctness, must be sought in something which is not now present in the language, that is, not present in the consciousness of the persons who use the language. This latter conviction comes out very clearly in the common custom of parsing a word or phrase of the language by resorting to the device of inserting something into the construction which is said to be understood. Thus the word *miles* in *He walked two miles*, is called an adverbial objective and the word is said to be objective because some governing preposition like *for*, or *for the distance of* is understood. But understood by whom and understood from what? Certainly no such understood words are present in the consciousness of either speaker or hearer when the use of the language is natural. They are understood only by a theoretical systematizer who imposes upon the real language his notions of what it ought to be. In this instance the explanation of the adverbial objective as an elliptical prepositional phrase is not even historically correct. The adverbial objective is a survival from Anglo-Saxon, in which, as in Latin, extent of time and space could be expressed by the accusative or objective case. And as by the regular development of English,

nouns in the objective case have the same form as in the nominative case, it has resulted in Modern English that this so-called adverbial objective does not differ at all from the nominative. In our present feeling there is no realization of an objective or accusative case at all in the word *miles* in *He walked two miles.* The words *two miles* are merely an adverb phrase modifying the verb. To justify the correctness of this idiom, it is not necessary to bring in the question of case at all, for the consciousness of case does not enter into the modern use of the construction, and any discussion of case is irrelevant. Historical origins may show how a construction like this arose, but the construction itself is what it is, not what it has been, or what it can be made to be by the application of theories of correctness.

But it is especially in the criticism of words that the etymological theorist is most active. A newspaper columnist once inserted a paragraph in his column with the heading *They don't mean what you think they do.* Then followed the three words, *livid*, *buxom*, and *humanitarian.* The columnist might have added many other words to this list, *lurid*, for example, to keep company with *livid.* But the three words are enough to test the principle involved. These words are said not to mean what you think they mean. The meaning you give to them is incorrect, and the true and right meaning is something quite different. Without raising the question what meaning you may happen to give to these words, consider for a moment how it is that any words have meaning. Do your words mean what you think they mean, or do they mean what they meant a thousand years ago, or what somebody else thinks they mean? Obviously words have

meanings only in the minds of persons as they are using them, and if I by chance use a word in a way which somebody else thinks is incorrect, nevertheless the meaning of the word as I used it is the only meaning it has for me. In short words do not have absolutely fixed logical contents. A word is not a container which can and must hold only a certain quantity and kind of the material of thought, as a gallon contains so much liquid content or a pound so many ounces of solid content. A word does not have a meaning, it has only meanings. And these innumerable meanings of words in the changing practices of speech are the real words. The dictionary definitions and etymological origins are only dry skeletons of words.

To return, however, to the three words *livid*, *buxom*, and *humanitarian*. We may take one of these as an illustration. The word *buxom* is by origin a native English word, and it has as its second element the same suffix as that which appears in *lissom*, *handsome*, *fulsome*, the golfing term *foursome*, *quarrelsome*, and other words. This suffix gives to the whole word the value of an adjective expressing the quality contained in the meaning of the first element of the compound. The first element of *buxom* is related to the verb *bow*, to bend, and the whole word therefore, by the test of its origin and composition, should mean pliant, easily bending, or some similar notion. That was indeed the earliest English meaning of the word in Anglo-Saxon. But that is not the meaning now. Probably most persons when they speak or hear or read the word *buxom* have before their minds the picture of a rosy, healthful, and rather ample female person. Such a person is likely to be pliant and to be able to bend easily, and it was this suggestion that started the word

on its career of change. But what now is the meaning of the word? Does the word as a word mean what it means in the minds of the persons who use it in its modern sense, or does the word as a word mean what it meant a thousand years ago? Does the word mean what you think it means, or does it mean what by some theory it might mean? But manifestly words can have meaning only in the active and practical communication of thought, and the meaning which they have under such circumstances is their true meaning. The correct sense of words cannot be determined by something which is no longer present in the consciousness of the persons who are a part of the life of the language. Hundreds of words in the language have departed radically from their original meanings. The word *gossip* was originally a compound made up of the word for *god* and the word for *friend*, and a gossip was a god-friend, or god-father, one of the sponsors for the up-bringing of a child. Such a person would naturally be a friend of the family, therefore one who knew the intimate affairs of the family, and by consequence a gossip. A *hussy*, now usually qualified as a brazen hussy, was originally a housewife, and here again one may trace a natural transition in meaning. But it would be easy to go too far in drawing inferences. The meaning of *hussy* does not lead one back to *housewife* as to a fundamental spiritual truth which underlies both words. The true meaning of *housewife* is not hussy, nor is housewife the true meaning of *hussy*. Etymologically they are the same word, but in meaning they are two very different words. It is impossible to arrive at the truth with respect to the thought contained in either of these words by looking at the other. Such was the vain method of the

Greek philosophers whom Plato ridiculed, and the method is as vain today as it ever was. The word *education* is derived from two Latin word elements, *ex* and *duco*, meaning to draw out or draw forth, and therefore the true function of education is defined by this etymological argument as drawing forth the possibilities of the person to be educated. The truth of the thought is thus discovered through the truth of the word. But all persons may not be convinced that education is a process of drawing forth. They may look upon it as a process of pouring in, in spite of Latin *ex* and *duco*, and yet may still continue to call the process by the name of education.

Numerous examples of this etymological philosophizing over words will be found in the writings of Ruskin. In one passage he elaborates on the word *wife*. What does this word mean? asks Ruskin. And with a confidence not shared by later philologists, he proceeds to derive *wife* from the same source as the verb *to weave*. Having made this etymology, he then expounds the fundamental truth contained in it. He reminds all wives that they must be either weavers, according to the true nature of wives, or moths, according to a perverted nature, weavers to help in building their husband's fortunes, or moths to help in destroying them. By a similar kind of reasoning the French are frequently said to have no equivalent for the English *home*. They have only the inadequate *chez moi, chez nous* to express the idea of *home*, and as they do not have the word *home*, the absurd inference is drawn that they have not what the English mean by home life — as though all Frenchmen passed all their lives on boulevards and in cafés.

Etymology is also often called upon to determine

correctness in many instances not so heavily fraught with philosophical meaning. For example, the phrase *under the circumstances* occurs in very wide and reputable present use, but it is nevertheless often condemned as incorrect and is changed to *in the circumstances*. The ground of this condemnation is etymological, for the word *circumstance* being made up of Latin *circum*, meaning 'around,' and *-stance* from the word meaning 'to stand,' the whole word *circumstance* would mean 'things standing around,' and it would therefore be absurd to speak of being under things that are standing around. But the simple truth is that though the elements of the word *circumstance* by origin mean standing and around, the word now means something quite different. It means merely the details attending a situation or an action, and both the notion of around and of standing have been completely lost from the present current sense of the word. On the side of meaning, either the preposition *under* or *in* may be appropriately used with the word, and if usage justifies both, as it does, then the one or the other may be used indifferently.

So also the use of *immediate* with a qualifying *more* or *most* accompanying it is condemned in spite of the fact that it is a generally current idiom. The objection is that *immediate* is made up of a Latin prefix of negative meaning and a second syllable which may be translated 'between,' the whole meaning 'nothing between.' But if there is nothing between, obviously the adjective qualification of a noun as *more immediate* or *most immediate* is absurd. It would be incorrect therefore to speak of satisfying one's most immediate needs. But in this construction, it is apparent that the word *immediate* no longer has its etymological sense. It means merely pressing or insistent,

and in this sense it has become a part of the familiar idiom of today. In constructions in which the word has acquired this sense, it would be incorrect to insist upon a meaning derived from the Latin origins of the word, just as it would be incorrect from the point of view of living English to make such a word as *delight* mean what its Latin elements would signify, or to make the intensive *awful*, so common in familiar speech, refer to *awe*, or the word *horrid* mean to us in English what it meant to Horace in Latin.

Another illustration may be found in the word *endorse*. Literally and etymologically this word means *on the back*, and it refers in the first place to the placing of a memorandum, signature, or other writing on the back of a document. But this first meaning is no longer the general meaning of the word in English. When one endorses a check to be sure the deed is done by writing one's name on the back of the check, but the word itself does not mean literally to write one's name on the back of a check. It means that the person to whom the check was first made payable relinquishes his right of payment in favor of somebody else. To the question, 'Where does one endorse a check?,' it is therefore a proper answer to say, 'One endorses it on the back.' The word *endorse* has in fact come to mean merely to give by a signature or stamp the proper authority for some action. Tickets are often sold with the limitation that they are good for certain uses only when they are properly endorsed, and the endorsing is often made on the face, not on the back of the ticket. A still more general use of *endorse* occurs in the phrase *to endorse a movement*, and it means here simply to give a movement the stamp of one's approval.

A word of native origin which has passed into a variety of senses is the word *bit*. Etymologically it is derived from the same root as the verb *bite*, and by this test, *bit* should mean only 'a bite,' 'a morsel.' But of course *bit* has wider uses than this. It can be made to apply to a small fragment of any material, a bit of plaster, a bit of wood, or we can give a person a bit of our mind, or ask him to wait a bit. What the etymologist says we cannot do, is to make the word *bit* refer to anything liquid, for *bit* refers only to things bitten, not to things drunk. Apparently one is permitted to speak of a bit of plaster or of wood, because plaster and wood may conceivably be bitten, but one is denied such ordinary English as *There was not a bit of water in the vase*. Manifestly, however, the word *bit* has acquired a sense very different from the primary sense of *bite*. It has come to mean a small quantity of any substance, even of a liquid substance. A parallel illustration may be noted in the word *brick*. This word is of the same origin as the verb *to break*, and a brick is etymologically a broken piece, a fragment. But a brick in the English of today is by no means a fragment. On the contrary, it is a composition of regular and mathematically exact shape. One may even speak of a broken brick. The true meaning and the correct meaning of *brick* is the meaning which it has actually in use, and in the same way one must determine the true meaning of *bit*.

Enough has been said, however, to show that the meanings of words in the living language are determined by the actual content which the words have in the minds of the persons who use the language. But a word of caution is called for here. All words in the English language do

not have meanings so definitely established by general use as to place their meanings beyond doubt. This is especially true of learned words. A constant demand for circumspection is placed upon every person who uses the English language by the fact that the vocabulary of the language contains many words the meanings of which do not rest upon simple and familiar elements in the vocabulary. Such words are usually acquired relatively late in the life of the individuals who use them and thus often lack the background of certainty which the simpler language enjoys. In these learned words appeal to etymology is often helpful in order to make clear a distinction between a careful and an undiscriminating use of the language. If one will use learned words, one can scarcely evade the responsibility for using them learnedly. The doubt comes, however, in certain instances in which one may not be quite sure how far a word has passed out of its original and learned sense into a general English idiomatic sense. Words like *education*, *mischief*, *trivial*, and dozens of others of the same kind, we know are no longer learned words, and we go only to their English uses to determine their idiomatic meanings. But many words in the language are not so easily disposed of. The word *oblivious*, for example, etymologically means 'forgetful,' and when one speaks of being oblivious of the presence of another person, this should mean that one had been aware of the presence of the other person but had forgotten the fact. Not infrequently, however, *oblivious* is employed, both in speaking and in writing, in the sense of 'unobservant of,' 'disregardful of.' Now, since the language has abundant simple ways of expressing the notion of unobservant or disregard-

ful, it would seem that if an ambitious word is used at all, it should be used with all its more refined implications.

The same is true also of words of somewhat technical character. Thus the word *primitive* is loosely used as scarcely more than a synonym for ancient or early, or for rough, crude, old fashioned. Perhaps this use may be regarded as permissible in easy going colloquial discourse, but if one is speaking with any degree of scientific exactness, then the word ought surely to be used with attention to its stricter etymological content. A popular confusion between *rigid* and *rigorous* would also be avoided in careful use. The word *rigid* means primarily 'stiff,' 'unbending,' but *rigorous* means 'severe,' 'stern.' To speak of *rigid discipline* when one means *rigorous discipline* is therefore somewhat undiscriminating. A more extreme example of careless English is the use of the word *unique* in the sense merely of 'strange,' 'remarkable,' the exacter application of the word being that which makes it refer to something which is alone of its kind, having no equal or parallel. These examples that have been given, in some instances at least, fall upon the border line between permissible and incorrect English, but the popular use of learned words is often quite beyond justification. To speak of *the omniscient eye of God* sounds well enough, but from the point of view of exactness of meaning, the phrase is an absurdity. In short, there is only one safe rule for the use of learned and unfamiliar words. If they are used at all, such words must be used with a full realization of their learned and unfamiliar connotations.

In native words also it may happen that occasionally an appeal to etymology is helpful in making clear a meaning which has become somewhat obscured through lack

of frequent and familiar use. An illustration is the word *eke* as a verb, usually found in the phrase *to eke out*. Etymologically this phrase means to increase something by adding to it. So a person may eke out his income by doing extra work, or if one has not much chicken, one can eke it out with rice. Sometimes, however, the word *eke* is used simply in the sense of acquiring by great effort or hard labor, as in "With pity he looked down upon those members of the human race . . . who labor to eke a meagre existence out of the products of the wilderness" (Boas, The Mind of Primitive Man, p. 1); "the Germans must eke along until the new harvest" (New York Tribune). But the two examples cited illustrate the fact that *eke* has become a somewhat unfamiliar, literary, and artificial word. Such words are easily avoided, and only a full realization of their values justifies the use of them.

The topics discussed in this chapter suggest one further subject of inquiry. The question is, What constitutes the identity of a word? Words are like all other objects in that we must recognize each of them to be itself by its particular marks of identification, just as an elm tree is recognized by the presence of certain characteristics of leaf, limb, and habits of growth, which give to the elm an identity of its own. Now with words we must always keep in mind a double aspect. Words have a physical form and a psychical form. The physical form of a word is its sound when pronounced and its visual representation when written or printed. In a highly developed literary language like English, the aural and visual aspects of words are inseparable. On the physical side it is extremely easy to recognize the identity of familiar words. No one has any doubt that the words *horse*, *tree*, *cow*, merely as

groups of sounds or groups of letters, are the same words that they were yesterday, or that they will continue in their identity in the future. But if one went back far enough, one might have certain doubts. For example, the word *tree* in Anglo-Saxon is *trēow*, and the word *cow* is *cū*. Are *trēow* and *cū* the same words as *tree* and *cow?* To the person who knows nothing of the history of the language, they are scarcely the same words, because they have not the marks of resemblance by which their identity is readily recognized. But to the trained student they are still the same words, because his fuller information enables him to recognize the same physical features in them and to explain the gradual change by which a word like Anglo-Saxon *trēow* has become Modern English *tree*. This is indeed a comparatively simple task of identification. The words *hussy* and *gossip*, mentioned above, look less like their Anglo-Saxon proto-types *hūs-wīf* and *god-sib*, and modern English *lord* and *lady* look still less like Anglo-Saxon *hlāford* and *hlǣfdige*. Yet these various words in their several forms contain sufficiently clear marks of identification on the side of sound and spelling, if one has knowledge enough to recognize these marks, to enable one to say with assurance that they are the same words. The problem of the modern science of etymology is largely the problem of discovering hidden and obscure identifications of this kind.

But the physical existence of a word is only half of its life, and the less important half. On the side of their psychical content, the recognition of the identity of words is not so simple a matter. It is probably true that no word ever has precisely the same content of meaning in two minds, or precisely the same meaning at two different

moments in the same mind. When one speaks of the identity of a word on the side of its meaning, one does not imply an absolute identity of meaning. The word *house* would be commonly understood to be the same word whether it refers to a three-room or a twelve-room house, a chicken house or a dog house, an ice house or a boat house. But would it be the same word when it refers to a political body, such as the House of Representatives at Washington, or the House of Commons in London? And the words *buxom* and *hussy*, which the etymologist has no hesitancy in identifying on their physical side with their Anglo-Saxon originals, are words like these in their modern senses the same words that they were in their Anglo-Saxon senses? No one could maintain that they are. It is evident indeed that the identity of a word on its psychical side is a very different thing from the identity of a word on its physical side. A word which changes its meaning becomes thereby, and in respect to meaning, a new word. Every change of significance implies a change of identity in the word. If the changes are relatively slight, by common consent they may be overlooked in the practical use of the language. But when several different psychical contents of a word of the same physical content thrust themselves upon the attention, then we have to do with as many different words on the psychical side as there are distinguishable differences in thought. Each of these different psychical words must stand on its own feet. They may be as independent of each other as they would be if they did not have the same or a similar physical form. They are in effect entirely separate words, and the correctness of one meaning cannot be determined by appeal to a different meaning.

XI

LOGIC

THE term "logic" has special and technical uses as well as more general applications. The general senses are the ones intended in the employment of the term in the present chapter. Just what the precise technical meaning of the term "logic" should be is a matter that must be left for the professional logician to decide. But the general meanings of the word are within the reach of everybody. Broadly these general meanings correspond to the processes of order and reasonableness in thinking. A person who speaks and writes logically arranges his thoughts in ways which satisfy the sense of proper relationships and sequence. One who does not speak or write logically, arranges his thoughts without rime or reason, in such a way that the hearer or reader is unable to foretell what the next step of the illogical person will be. The illogical person fails to satisfy the expectations of the person who is looking for what seems to him a natural and coherent expression of thought. A thought which does not seem to arise out of a preceding thought or which does not seem to bear any reasonable relation to a succeeding thought, or which does not seem to be rationally connected with the situation which the language is supposed to reveal, is commonly regarded as an illogical thought. Some persons are said to have logical minds, that is, to express themselves in ways which bear proper relationships to the objects and the ideas they desire to express.

The illogical mind produces an impression of lack of harmony between the forms of expression and the content of it. In this general sense we also speak of the logic of circumstances, meaning thereby that plausible relation of the elements in a situation which corresponds to our conviction of their proper connection one with another. It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss this notion of orderliness and reasonableness in language, which we have called logic, from the point of view of its value as a test of correctness in language.

The appeal to logic so frequently made as a test of correctness in speech is not surprising, when one considers the close connection which exists between logic and language. In a way logic and language may be regarded as double aspects of the same thing. John Stuart Mill somewhere remarks that the structure of every sentence is a lesson in logic. For language provides the forms in which thought must of necessity be molded. What we are agreed to call logical ways of thought come to the child as the child learns the formal ways of expressing thought. The child's mind becomes logical as the child acquires language.

A curious inquirer might thus be led to raise a difficult question. The question would be, Does the mind become logical because it acquires language, or does language become logical because logic is inherent in the nature of the mind? If the latter possibility is accepted, then language is merely a reflection of an innate logical necessity that exists independently of any forms of expression. But if the former possibility be preferred, then logic is practically equivalent to language — that is, logic is no more than the customary ways of expressing thought. What

is expressed in accordance with the established habits of expression in the language thus seems to us reasonable and logical, and these habits give to us an assurance of the existence of an ordered intellectual universe.

Without attempting to prove that either the one or the other of these suppositions is correct, we may dwell for a moment on the notion of the intimate connection between logic and language. For if the theory of innate logical ideas in the mind is correct, we may point out that the only way the existence of these ideas can be made comprehensible, whether by a thinker to himself or to other persons, is by means of language. Imageless thought is an alluring hope, but one the expression of which the human mind has not yet realized. We can think only by the aid of forms and symbols of some kind, and language is pre-eminently the medium through which mind must know itself. As life, in Shelley's famous figure, "like a dome of many colored glass, stains the white radiance of eternity," so language, encompassing every human action, is the disguise which all intelligible life must wear.

On the other hand, if logic is nothing more than the sum of the customary habits of the language, which long experience has made us feel to be the natural and necessary ways of thinking, it loses nothing of its significance so far as the life of man is concerned. Logic may be man-made, it may be the child of man's experimentations in the art of self-expression. As the bird has song, so man may have his logic. But if this is so, logic is as much a necessity in human life as it would be if we could think of it as coming down in the form of a pure gift from heaven. For a sense of order, of intelligible sequence

and relationships is one of the constant demands of all human existence, not only among the learned, but with the unlearned as well. And whether we elect to denote the source from which this sense of order comes to us as logic or as language makes very little difference. In the work of everyday practical experience they are the same.

Whatever logic is, therefore, we may agree upon the first general proposition that language is logical. It is through language that our desire for intelligibility is satisfied. When language becomes unintelligible, when it fails to express a comprehensible sequence of ideas, it ceases to be language. It becomes then merely a succession of meaningless syllables. An ingenious person can invent words which sound as though they might be language. But the most plausible of words without sense are but sound and fury, signifying nothing. So the English of a maniac may seem like language, but it is not language if it has no ordered sequence and meaning in it. Perhaps we may call it a pathological or diseased form of language, but this merely means that it has lost that essential distinguishing mark of intelligibility by which language is known to be language.

The language as a whole we may agree, then, to regard as logical, but the question remains, how far can this general quality of the language be made to apply in the disposition of individual situations in the language? Is the language not only logical in its general result, in its ability to satisfy in a large way the sense of intelligibility, but is a language like English also logical in all its details? And if it is not thus logical, ought it to be so, and must those uses which fail to measure up to the demands of logic

be called incorrect, or perhaps even worse, must they be described as like the pathological ravings of the maniac?

In the first place, we may point out that a good deal in the English language that may seem to us like logical necessity is certainly only the accidental result of fixed habits of expression. The logical position of the adjective is not exclusively the English position before the word the adjective modifies. In Latin the normal position of the adjective was after the modified noun, as it still is in French. Nor is the English word order of subject, predicate, and object an inherent necessity of speech. The verb might reasonably come first, as it frequently does in emphatic expression. In *Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down*, Coleridge used both orders in the same sentence. In poetry the object likewise frequently comes before the verb and the subject. These less common word orders, however, cannot be regarded as lapses from a more correct order, to be pardoned possibly in poetry, since poetry has laws and liberties of her own, but to be condemned from the point of view of the innate proprieties of the speech. The truth is that the language by its inherent structure demands no specific order of words. All it demands is that the words satisfy the sense of intelligibility, and within this broad limitation lies room for not a little variability. The analogical habit of repeating similar actions in similar ways naturally tends to reduce the number of these variations, but the vital spirit in the language always struggles against the tyranny of an unyielding and absolute regularity.

The question of the split infinitive hinges on the sacredness of the traditional word order. The word *to*, known

as the sign of the infinitive, in this use has had a somewhat complicated history. It is, however, by origin no more than a preposition, and in the archaic *for to*, as in *What went ye out for to see?* the preposition is doubled. Nor is it true that *to* is a necessary sign of the infinitive. In the two sentences *I must go* and *I ought to go*, the word *go* is as much an infinitive, at least historically, without the sign *to* as with it. The sign of the infinitive with the accompanying verb is therefore by origin a prepositional phrase, and on logical grounds, nothing prevents the separation of a preposition and its object by an intervening word. One may say *The futility of further resistance was apparent*, or *The futility of further resisting was apparent*, and as logically parallel to these constructions, we might have a split infinitive, as in *It became apparent that to further resist was futile.* This is the logical argument for the split infinitive. It is strong enough, purely on the logical side, to make it impossible to call the split infinitive incorrect. But it is not strong enough to make the split infinitive correct in practice beyond doubt or question. The appeal to logic cannot decide the question of correctness. In this particular instance the difference between the two forms logically is very slight. The meaning is conveyed in approximately the same way by the split infinitive as by the un-split infinitive. But even if there were a marked logical advantage in one of the forms over the other, logic would still remain inadequate as a principle determining correctness. For the language, though logical in its general intent and purpose, does not make logic the only saving grace of speech. Just as analogy has been of fundamental importance in determining the structure of the language, and yet now and

then has been freely disregarded, so also logic yields at times to a force greater than its own.

Even the most familiar and simplest aspects of daily speech do not escape the severe eye of the logician. The natural language indulges in such sentences as *All men are not selfish.* The logician says this is incorrect, that what you mean and what you must say is, *Not all men are selfish.* Or the natural language says, *I don't think it will rain.* The logician shudders at such intellectual crudity and changes the sentence to *I think it will not rain.* On the same grounds the logician rejects such sentences as *He gave me nothing, He has paid me no money.* When one natural man asks *Can't you go?* and another answers *Yes,* this is of course a logical absurdity. The English usage puzzles the Chinese, for in Chinese an affirmative answer to a negative question confirms the negation and does not state an affirmative. The answer to this question means therefore to the Chinese what the logician says it should mean to everybody, *Yes, I can't go.* And this rule makes the line of the popular song *But yes we have no bananas today* both logically, grammatically, and stylistically correct — at least to the logician.

The rule that sentences must not end with prepositions likewise rests for such authority as it has on certain demands of logic. Literally the word "preposition" refers to something placed before something else, and the preposition ordinarily does stand before its object. How can a word be a preposition, therefore, and stand at the end of a sentence? The two things are logically impossible. In spite of the logician's reasoning, however, prepositions may and do stand at the end of idiomatic sentences. In complex sentences containing a relative clause in which

the relative is omitted but in which the relative, if expressed, would be the object of a preposition, the only idiomatic position for the preposition which the language permits is at the end of the sentence. And in complex sentences containing the double relative *what* as the object of a preposition, the more natural word order calls for the preposition at the end of the sentence. So we have two such perfectly idiomatic forms of expression as *This is the very chair he sat in*, and *I know what you are thinking about*. These sentences may seem to have a slightly colloquial flavor, but if so, this is because the literary style is so much inclined to favor artificial and theoretical refinement of language. But to demand that these two sentences be changed to *This is the very chair in which he sat*, and *I know about what you are thinking* would be putting the language into a bed of Procrustes and stretching it until the life had been stretched out of it.

Many other locutions in the language with all the prestige of long and respectable use back of them are nevertheless often condemned as incorrect by the theorist who rests all correctness upon logic. A case in point is represented by those words which supposedly name an absolute form or condition, words like *round*, *square*, *perpendicular*, *horizontal*, and other geometrical terms, or words like *full*, *perfect*, *complete*, *finished*, and many similar words. The objection is that since these words express ideas which when rightly conceived are fixed and final, it is logically impossible, therefore linguistically indefensible, to use the words comparatively. By this rule it would be incorrect to speak of something as being *more round* or *most round*, *more square* or *most square*. For anything which is round or square or perpendicular or horizontal is that

and nothing else, and therefore there can be no question of variability about it. So the idea of *perfect* does not permit such modifications as *more perfect* or *most perfect.* But obviously no degree of logical condemnation of such constructions can make them incorrect, or can diminish their use in the practical life of the language. And in this instance it must be said that the logician's argument is unusually feeble. For when these words of absolute meaning are thus used comparatively, they plainly do not have their absolute meanings. When one of two objects is described as being rounder than the other, the word "rounder" is not a comparative degree of the geometrical idea of roundness, but all the statement means is that one of the two objects approximates more nearly than the other the state of roundness. And when the word "perfect" is used comparatively, it is not thought of as expressing an absolute state, but the word becomes in this use nothing more than a vague intensive of approval.

Another construction in general use is that illustrated by such a sentence as *I don't go to the theatre oftener than I can help.* But the logician reconstructs this. He tells us to say what we mean and that what we mean is, *I don't go to the theatre oftener than I can't help.* But though this reconstructed sentence corresponds in detail more exactly to the logic of the situation, the plain fact is that however correct logically it may be, idiomatically it is incorrect. Idioms are often defined as phrases the sense of which cannot be deduced from the words considered separately, like *to wade in his own blood, to put up with, bids fair, in this connection, to have a falling out,* and hosts of similar expressions. If the logical test were applied to these phrases in detail, then all of them would be incor-

rect. And undoubtedly persons obsessed with the notion of logic often do refrain from using simple, homely idiomatic English. They prefer a more mathematically exact English, and they are not troubled if it is also a cold and lifeless English.

The double negative is no longer permissible in cultivated English, and the reason ordinarily given for its disappearance from approved speech is that it violates logic. Two negatives, the common statement runs, make an affirmative. But two negatives do not make an affirmative in the intention of the person who uses the double negative, nor does the cultivated speaker when he hears the illiterate speaker deliver himself of a sentence containing two negatives take these negatives as an affirmative. The two negatives are an affirmative to him only when he sits down and in the pride of intellect reflects that two negatives ought to make an affirmative. But for hundreds of years throughout the whole of the Anglo-Saxon and the Middle English periods, the cultivated English language employed two negatives to express negative meaning. The second negative merely strengthened the meaning of the first negative. And if a third was added, as in Chaucer's *He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde*, the expression still did not become an affirmative but only a negative one shade stronger.

From the foregoing discussion it becomes apparent that a little logic is a dangerous thing. It is a dangerous and futile practice to quibble over the details of expression the intent and meaning of which are not in doubt. What counts in the end is not how the language might express or ought to express meaning, but how it does express meaning. If the meaning is expressed, the purpose of

language is satisfied. For all language is logical in the sense that it conveys a meaning when the language communication is adequate. But the language communication may be adequate and the form of it may still not be analyzable into logically clear and clean-cut elements. The part of wisdom in such instances is to take language as we find it.

XII

AUTHORITY

Analogy, logic, and etymology as principles of correctness in English are at least based upon reasonable judgments which are reached by the observation of some of the genuine processes of language. Their insufficiency as final guides to the use of good English arises from the fact that the living language of a people is not immediately subject to reason. Language is a possession of society, and social activities do not respond as quickly and regularly to rational direction as perhaps they ought to do. In this chapter, however, a different method of determining correctness will be examined, a method in which rational principles are subordinated and an appeal is made to an authority which removes from the individual the responsibility of making judgments of his own.

Authority is of various kinds. Upon every person rests the necessity of submitting to a power beyond individual control in carrying on the activities of the language with due respect to its proprieties. But there is a great difference between a blind submission and an intelligent submission to authority. It is the former of these two kinds of submission to authority that will be considered in the paragraphs of this chapter.

One kind of blind submissiveness in language is that which goes in general with temperamental conservatism. By nature many persons seem inclined to like only that which is customary and established, and to look with

disfavor and suspicion on anything that is new or seems to be new. The unexpected makes such persons uncomfortable. They are happy only when the conventions with which they are familiar are observed. As language is a universal social custom, it becomes for that reason and for many persons a readily applicable criterion of conformity, of refinement, and of gentility. But there is an obvious danger in this prunes and prisms state of mind. Gentility and elegance may easily become an obsession, and the fear of vulgarity in speech often makes language colorless and precise. The temperamental conservative is thus often led to object to that in language which is merely fresh and vigorous. Just where we should draw the line is not always easily determinable, but a charitable attitude of mind is certainly more healthful than a scornful one.

An illustration of this sentimental conservatism may be noted in the criticisms which the authors of *The King's English* (second edition, pp. 23–25) direct against Kipling. In his use of descriptive epithets, Kipling is accused of a certain kind of vulgarity, a certain Americanism, because of their "remorseless precision." One infers that the vague and conventional epithet, the guarded language of polite society, appeals to the authors of *The King's English* more than the vivid and expressive word that brings one face to face with reality. Now anyone who likes his tea weak must certainly be allowed the privilege of exercising his personal choice, but by no means does it follow that this personal preference should be elevated to the position of a principle of correctness.

In justification of this condemnation of temperamental conservatism, it may be noted that the opposite tendency,

that is radicalism in language, is not frequently defended or practiced, and for obvious reasons. Language is primarily and above all a medium of transmission. It is like the wire which carries a telegraph message, essential to the communication but itself not adding anything to it. The person who is interested in transmitting radical thought usually therefore has little desire to distract attention from his thought to the vehicle which carries it. He may burn to lay impious hands upon all the laws of God and man, but rarely feels any desire to violate the conventions of speech. These conventions he respects, not because he regards them as more sacred than any other, but because they are practically more useful, more necessary, to him.

Yet at times certain actions in language are indulged in which must be characterized as radical. Whenever a convention is violated merely for the sake of violating the convention, whenever a customary practice is replaced by another for the sake of shocking the hearer or reader into attention, these must be called radical actions. Examples of the first kind will be found in the writings of Walt Whitman, where a certain rough handling of the conventions of the English language was cultivated as appropriate to the manner and intent of the writings as a whole. Thus we have outlandish word-formations, like *camaradoes*, curious syntax, like *O me imperturbe*, sentences often without verbs, and others often grammatically correct but without observance of the ordinary traditions of rhetorical construction. Even with Whitman, however, these extravagances are held pretty well in check. Too great indulgence in linguistic eccentricity would have exposed him to the charge of trifling. Even the extreme

radical must be careful not to be too bizarre in language. When Whitman is at his best, he is stylistically least eccentric. In the poem *Captain, my Captain*, in only one line, "I walk the deck my captain lies," is there a divergence from conventional English in the use of *lies* as a transitive verb.

Radical practices of the second kind, in which a striking departure from expected use is indulged in for the sake of violently arresting the attention, are more frequently met with but often with accompanying apology. In written English a word or phrase is often put into quotation marks to indicate that though the writer uses the word or phrase, he does so with due acknowledgment that both he and his reader are aware of what he is doing by using it. In spoken language a certain stressing of a word, a smile, a raising of the eyebrows, serves the same purpose as the quotation marks of printing.

Many affectations of speech are in effect radical, though often they are the habits of persons who would be shocked to find any of their actions so designated. But the person who speaks differently from other persons merely because he wishes to be different, who thinks that distinction in speech resides in being strange, cannot be otherwise designated. It may be that at times such practices are justified by their ends. The question is whether the ends are justified. The preacher who defended his pronunciation of *either* and *neither* with the vowel of *wider*, though his own natural pronunciation and that of his community gave these words the vowel of *leader*, on the ground that the novel pronunciation was effective in preaching because it made the language of the pulpit seem different from the language of ordinary life and thus attracted a special

attention to it, may have known whereof he was speaking. A certain amount of violence in matters ordinarily indifferent may occasionally add a little spice to life. It is extremely easy, however, to season the dish of speech too strongly. Speech is the staff of the intellectual life and is best when it is simple and wholesome. Perhaps no speech is more offensive than the feeble humor of those tireless speakers who seek novelty by the violent mutilation of words, who cannot use the word *picturesque* without pronouncing it *picturaskew*, or *fatigue* without pronouncing it *fattygew*, or the word *delicious* without corrupting it into *deluscious*, or *animal* without changing it to *animile*, and so without end.

A very common kind of submission to authority is that of the faithful blind. Such persons usually accept their authority upon authority. They usually take some person's word for it that this or that dictionary or grammar or guide to good English is the best, and having accepted their authority, they follow it blindly. It becomes the book that they "go by." When confronted with a question of correctness in speech, they seek the answer in their authority, and having found it there, they rest at ease in Zion. They swallow their creed and then promulgate it as dogma. But the extreme unintelligence of such a habit of mind is equaled only by its narrowness. It waives the whole matter of independent observation and judgment. As language is a form of social custom, it would be just as crude to govern one's speech in this way as it would be to regulate one's conduct in other social matters by guides to good manners and books of etiquette. But any person who is socially alive knows that the delicate adjustments of social life cannot be learned from books.

A word further should be said, however, on the value of books, especially the dictionaries, in the determination of correctness in the language. Obviously no single dictionary, and not even all the English dictionaries together, can be a complete record of the language. For one thing, dictionaries are bound to be ancient by the time they are published. It takes years of labor first to collect the materials for a comprehensive dictionary, and even the task of printing and distributing a large book like a dictionary is a matter not of weeks and months, but often of years. The most recent of dictionaries cannot, therefore, be a record of the living present. Its interest and its value must be primarily historical. Then again every dictionary that has ever been made has been based upon the observations of a comparatively few persons. Sometimes dictionaries have been made by a single person — by a Dr. Johnson. But even the most elaborate of modern dictionaries, with all its staff of readers and specialists, must be the work of a few persons as compared with the vast numbers of the persons in whom the language exists as a common social possession. The wisdom and the experience of these few may be great, but their wisdom and their experience cannot conceivably be as great as the wisdom and the activity of the whole of the English people. A dictionary is therefore not only an ancient, but it is also a partial record of the language. The very point which one may need at a particular moment to decide a question of correctness may be a point that the dictionary chosen as authority fails to record, or records inadequately. The dictionary may be in error. In fact the dictionary is always in error when it leads a person who consults it to use a form of speech which makes the

person's speech ineffective in a living human situation. For what does it profit a man's soul to be correct by the dictionary and yet fail to win a sympathetic hearer or reader? A good dictionary is an important aid. It can supply often an abundance of information which has a suggestive value. But even the best dictionary cannot render absolute and universal decisions. It provides material only for adaptation, not for blind acceptance. The actual vital moment in which it is necessary to use a word in speaking or in writing is of infinitely greater importance than all the authority of the dictionary.

Books on usage, handbooks, collections of errors, and similar works must all be regarded in the same way as the dictionaries. These books contain thousands of instances of errors to be avoided, and if one should take them all seriously, speaking and writing English would become a sort of obstacle race, an exceedingly slow and dull race, however, because of the great number of the obstacles. But such books are not to be taken too seriously. None of them can claim infallibility or universality. What they say must always be submitted to critical judgment, and an adverse judgment based upon direct observation of the practices of living speech, if adverse judgment seems necessary, is linguistically both more intelligent and safer than blind obedience.

Because of the great diversity of practice which always exists in pronunciation, dictionaries and similar works are specially untrustworthy as absolute authorities for correctness in this part of the use of the language. The tendency of the dictionaries is always to fix upon one pronunciation, even when several are current, with the result that in some instances a great majority of the people who

use the language, by the authority of the dictionary, speak incorrectly. Thus the dictionary pronunciation of the vowel in words like *half*, *glass*, *path*, *dance*, and others, is almost universally given as being like, or approximately like, the vowel of *father*, whereas in actual speech, unquestionably the vowel in America is more frequently heard as like, or approximately like, the vowel of *gather*. It will not do, therefore, to say that the vowel of *father* is the correct pronunciation, and the vowel of *gather* an incorrect popular corruption. In fact a speaker might very well use the dictionary pronunciation with the vowel of *father* in many a cultivated community and thereby merely make himself seem affected and artificial in speech.

So also the whole class of words like *hot*, *got*, *not*, and dozens of others, is regularly recorded in the dictionaries as having a vowel sound very close in quality, though shorter in quantity, to the vowel of *taught*. In reality, however, the vowel sound in the general American pronunciation of these words is close in quality to the sound heard in *father*. The dictionary that fails to record this fact gives in so far an inadequate picture of the language as it exists on the lips of living men and women.

Even more striking examples can be found in the way in which the accenting of words is treated in the dictionaries. The rules of English accent are notoriously unsettled and chaotic, and the dictionaries often attempt to escape from this chaos by the simple method of following a mechanical rule of regularity. Many dissyllabic words of Latin origin, for example, composed of a prefix and a root syllable, have only one dictionary pronunciation, with the stress on the second or root syllable. In actual speech, however, the stress is sometimes prevailingly on

the first syllable, and sometimes on the first or the second, according to position. The adjective *relay*, as in *relay races* is regularly stressed on the first syllable in actual speech, but not regularly so in the dictionaries. Other words of the same form which should be examined from the point of view of their dictionary record as compared with their actual use are words like *rebate, rebound, recess, recondite, reflex.* Similarly instructive are nouns of the type of *detail, defile, defect.* The noun *ally* has in its so-called correct pronunciation only a stress on the second syllable, and the same generalizing tendency appears in the dictionary treatment of nouns and adjectives like *combine, abstract, occult.* In actual speech, on the contrary, a very strong tendency is present to stress these words, especially the nouns, on the first syllable. With the adjectives the stress often varies according to syntactical position. Thus when the adjective *abstract* stands immediately before its noun, the tendency is to stress the first syllable, as in *ab'stract reasoning*, but when it stands in the emphatic position, the stress on the second syllable may occur, as in *His reasoning was very abstract'*. Precisely this kind of variability frequently fails of record in the dictionaries. In fact these shadings of real speech are probably so numerous and so delicate that an adequate rule for them could not be made. They must be acquired as practical habits not from books, but from familiarity with the language as it lives and grows in its own free surroundings.

Although the obligation of independent judgment and decision in questions of correctness rests in general upon all persons whose use of the language is intelligent, certain situations possibly permit a dogmatic treatment of the

language. But these situations are always special and limited. Children who have not yet reached the age when they are capable of independent observation can scarcely be asked to decide questions of correctness for themselves. They can be taught to observe, however, and thus taught to acquire the ability of deciding such questions. Sometimes also groups of people working together in a joint activity are asked to yield their individual preferences in speech and to follow the rules as laid down for the governance of the whole body. So the superintendent or the principal of a school may demand of all those under his authority submission to the rules of good English as he defines them. Or the editors of a newspaper may have their style card and may require all persons who write for the newspaper to observe the forms of expression specified on the style card. This kind of submission to authority is in no way reprehensible. Questions of correctness in language are not questions of moral conduct. If outward circumstances require the modification of one's private convictions in speech, yielding implies no disgrace. For not only the right of private opinion remains, but also the practice of it in circumstances less mechanically determined.

Finally the authority of "the best authors," the best speakers and writers, is often made an excuse for the avoidance of independent judgment. It has been seriously maintained, as by Professor Lounsbury,[1] that no English can be called good until it has received the stamp of approval by use in the best authors. The reverse of this is not necessarily accepted, that is, all the English of an approved author is not approved as good English.

[1] See *Standard of Usage*, pp. 101 ff.

But the point is that any particular question of correctness in English can be decisively answered by appeal to the best English authors, not to one author, but to the cumulative evidence of "the best authors." What is found exemplified in these authors is good English, what is not found is incorrect English.

But the question immediately arises, Who are the best authors? Shakspere ought to qualify, but Shakspere's English is no test for present use. If we seek to discover who are the good authors of present time, we shall find that no common agreement exists. Authors cannot be measured by any absolute standard. Each person must therefore make his own selection among the many possible choices. The authority of "the best authors," or the best speakers and writers, in the end does not remove the necessity of individual judgment. For every person must find his own way in the wilderness of literary authorities. The ability to do this successfully comes only as the result of a wide experience and of a delicate adjustment to the infinite possibilities of expression in the language. The authority of good authors ceases then to be the simple, safe, and infallible rule which at first it seemed to be.

Apart from all the difficulties of its practical application, the principle that no English can be called good English until it has the stamp of literary approval is far too limited to deserve serious consideration. The colloquial and the familiar levels of the language have also their justification, and even in literary English, a narrowly literary attitude towards the language is not likely to lead to the best results in writing. Out of it would come in the end a formalistic and inflexible kind of writing which would be useful only as the language of a special guild of

writers. A class language for a literary aristocracy, however, seems scarcely an ideal to arouse enthusiasm. More appealing would be the project of throwing all words, all constructions of the language, into the melting pot of popular and unsophisticated usage, taking as valid English whatever came out. The language would certainly not lose in reality and directness, in certainty of meaning and feeling. What the popular mind genuinely assimilates, it expresses in terms that bring the expression close to immediate experience. The vagueness and the decay of learned words in popular use is often only a decay from the learned point of view, for the popular mind gives all words which are genuinely popular a clear meaning. But a little learning is the dangerous thing. Half-learned English has neither the unconscious certainty of popular English nor the scholarly precision of the carefully correct speaker and writer. Authors can bring nothing but harm to the language if they lead to the substitution of a vaguely remembered literary English in the place of the simpler and more natural English of the common life of the English people.

The faithful disciple of authority often bases his practice in language on a foundation broader than good authors when he professes to rest upon the custom of the best speakers and writers, or upon the consensus of the best opinion as to what the use of the language should be. Custom and use, however, are not exactly the same thing. The distinction which prevails in legal terminology with respect to these words may also be made to apply to language. Custom is use which has become generalized in practice. But custom implies no absolute degree of extent of use. When a situation arises only twice and is

satisfied by the same practice of language, within these limits the practice is already a custom of the language. In Horace's famous definition, therefore,

> cadentque
> Quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,
> Quem penes arbitrium est et jus et norma loquendi,
> ARS POETICA, 70–72.

the word *usus* should be translated by the English word *custom*. The lines might be paraphrased as follows: Words which are now held in honor fall into decay, if custom so determines, wherein rests the decision and the law and the ordering of speech. But of customs in the language the number and the diversity are infinite. No select group of speakers and writers has ever discovered or even exemplified the absolutely true custom of the language. A consensus of opinion is always a consensus only within a limited group. In the end, therefore, the authority of the usage or the custom of the best speakers and writers, the consensus of the best opinion, are also matters of choice and judgment. To choose the best exemplars of speech is the same thing as choosing the best speech. In this world of confusion and strife, choice is sometimes difficult, but the difficulty by no means justifies a blind and unintelligent choice.

XIII

THE MORALS OF GOOD ENGLISH

WHETHER the principle of correctness be analogy, logic, etymology, or some kind of formal authority, these external rules of procedure can never be decisive for good English. They can never be so because such rules are rational generalizations and abstractions, whereas every act of language is an individual act, as important on the emotional as on the intellectual side, and with its own special needs and adaptations. The final test of good English must therefore be sought not in generalizations based upon the past performances of the language, or upon theoretical prescriptions, but in the very nature of the language as a living and present activity. Rules of correctness, it is true, may be sensible and reasonable, and mildly applied, they may have a certain suggestive value in directing or clarifying the immediate uses of the language. When they are administered too strenuously, however, they become false and harmful. They lose their suggestive value and change from opinions to dogmas. The difference between opinion and dogma has been described as like the different notes which can be produced on a fife. By blowing with moderate force, a middle tone is produced, but by blowing much harder on the same position, the tone is raised an octave. Theories of correctness in speech, when they are held reasonably and moderately, are opinions which may be interesting and helpful. When one bears too heavily upon them, they

change their character and become dogmas, and as such have no place in the free life of the language.

Correctness in language is therefore a notion of very limited usefulness. The essence of correctness is conformity to specifications. The rules of correctness are made first from former acts of speech and present speech is then adapted to the rules. But as a living activity we find that in speech infinite diversity exists. No two persons ever have the same impulses in speech or are ever surrounded by the same circumstances. The effect of rules rigorously applied would be therefore to impose a mechanical regularity upon that which is not regular. Rules can produce uniformity only by destroying that diversity which is the evidence of genuine life in language. Only in the most elementary and broadest way, therefore, can rules of correctness be made the tests of good English. For English which is correct, English which is written to correspond to specifications, is not by that fact alone good English. In writing or speech of any pretension to dignity, this kind of correctness may be taken for granted. It is too elementary to be counted as a virtue. It is merely a common necessity, a necessity that must not be permitted to usurp the place of other things more important. The rules of correctness must be the servants, not the masters of language. There is something greater, something much more interesting, in the successful use of language than correctness. But the less cannot produce the greater, and one may worship never so faithfully at the altar of correctness without catching a glimpse of the face of the true goddess of good English.

The fear of decay and disintegration in the language undoubtedly accounts in a large degree for the respect

which is paid to the rules of correctness. And if the rules really could accomplish the end of preventing deterioration, or of keeping society homogeneous and the members of it mutually more intelligible and interesting to each other, then the rules would deserve the most faithful obedience and commendation. They might even be accepted as compulsory. All the English speaking peoples might unite in an academy, or institute, or a league of good English, and having laid down their rules, they might acquire power to enforce obedience to them in every school, printing office, newspaper, pulpit, bar, and street corner in the English speaking world. Of course proposals like this in spirit have been made from time to time and are still being made. In the New York *Times* for October 8, 1923, a former editor of a London newspaper proposed an Institute of English, by which the language "can be purified and standardized against a peril which now threatens it." The peril lies in what is characterized as that "indiscriminate system of language building" which has become a "menace to the purity and natural evolution of English." "Everywhere uncontrolled forces are at work," continued the proposer of this new institute, "distorting the language of Shakespeare, carrying on a policy of drift with a riotous individualism which mars the purity and blurs the beauty of the language and tends to disintegration."

What is advocated here is control and forcible regulation of the language. The policy of drift, we are told, is distorting the language of Shakspere. But one may ask how it happened that Shakspere could become the supreme master of English without an institute to help him. Or has the world and human nature changed so

greatly since Shakspere's day that mankind can no longer trust to the impulses which produced Shakspere's genius? If there ever was an age of "riotous individualism" in the English language, however, it was the age of Shakspere and of Marlowe, of Nashe, Greene, Peele, and all the other lesser and greater stars of the Elizabethan firmament. Never has the English language since the time of the Normans been subject to so many violent alterations and sudden additions as in the day of the Renascence. The language then was Gallicized, Italianized, Latinized, Hellenized with a thoroughness and an abandon that makes all later modifications of the common speech seem feeble and insignificant. Formal respect for our venerable mother tongue has certainly increased with the passing of time.

But in his own day, even Shakspere did not escape criticism. There were those who cherished rules for which Shakspere showed not the proper consideration. To Ben Jonson, the beauties of Shakspere's language were only "woodnotes wild." In short every age has had its critical souls who have cried alarm at the slightest linguistic occasion. Their desire has been to tame the English language, to make of it a gentle lamb that would remain peacefully in the pen wherein they would fold it. But no proposals for academies or institutes to regulate and control the English language have ever had more than an ephemeral interest. Their practical significance has been negligible. No doubt on the academic and theoretical side, an intelligently conducted institute of English could get together a great deal of interesting material on the language. What it had to offer, however, could have only suggestive, not regulative value. An institute

would be no more capable of formulating absolute and final rules for the language than the compilers of a dictionary. And an institute would be like a dictionary in that it could make rules only on the basis of what had been done in the language. Its decisions would of necessity all be historical. They could not therefore be made determining for the present and the future acts of the persons who speak and write the English language, for in all immediate use of the language, something exists more compelling than history or the past. To find a true test of excellence in English, one must look in the direction of this greater force which inheres in the very nature of the activity of speech.

If correctness and conformity to appointed rules are discarded as final tests of good English, anarchy is not by any means the only remaining alternative. Men and women do not necessarily resort to a "riotous individualism" because there are no official police to keep them in order. For there are forces within the genuine life of language sufficiently powerful to keep the language from degenerating into chaos. Whatever is is not necessarily good in the English language. No individual has the power, and no rational individual has the desire, to fashion language exclusively in such forms as seem to him personally and privately satisfactory. If he does so, he runs the risk of destroying the purpose for which even his own speech exists. A fundamental condition of mature speech is its social character. Most acts of speech suppose an attempt to bring at least two personalities into contact. Undoubtedly the desire of self-expression also plays a large part in all spoken or written language. But self-expression that falls upon a deaf ear is not very satisfying.

The egoist and individualist soon finds that self-expression becomes possible only when a decent regard is paid to the way in which the recipient is willing to receive the expression. Language thus becomes something more than an implement for the private use of an individual. In self-defense, every person is compelled to take account of the social demands and penalties which are involved in the use of the speech.

Two great controlling forces inherent in the life of the language unite to keep the English language in order. Good English is the consequent of the successful working of these two forces. One of the two is the simple principle of utility. Usage cannot make English good, because usage belongs to the past, but usefulness is a part of the immediate life and necessity of language, and utility or usefulness goes a long way towards making English good. Manifestly every linguistic act has a certain work to perform. The language is a mechanism devised to accomplish certain ends. If a particular act of language fails to accomplish the end for which the act is performed, then the act of language is just as imperfect as language as a bladeless knife would be as a knife. Certainly English must do its work if it is to be good English. Perhaps one might be tempted to rest here and to regard utility and efficiency as in themselves sole and sufficient tests of good English. But utility and efficiency must be broadly interpreted to take on so rich a meaning. Ordinarily they refer only to one half of the activity of language, that half which has to do with successfully persuading or interesting or informing the recipient of the communication.

If that is good English by the test of utility which accomplishes its end, the question naturally arises, is all

English which accomplishes its end good? In the use of the language, may one become all things to all men? If an end could be accomplished by the use of bad grammar or by vulgar intonations in pronunciation, would the successful accomplishment of the end justify the bad grammar and the vulgar pronunciations and make them good? What would be the position, for example, of the traveling salesman who travels from one end of the country to the other and who must talk persuasively to all sorts and conditions of men? Shall he change his speech with every change of surroundings?

In answer to these questions several considerations present themselves. For one thing, it is not so easy to be all things to all men. It is much easier to follow the rules of correctness. Many persons are willing to be all things to all men, their only doubt being what other men are. And in fact only the greatest geniuses have been able to play successfully the part of being all things to all men. At almost any moment in the use of our language, we are trying to realize this ideal of being all things to all men. In vocabulary we select words to suit the particular person to whom we are talking. We select subjects to talk about and ways of talking about them, and we select even a tone of voice which we deem appropriate to the time and the person. In an extreme situation we might even be tempted to violate some of the commonly accepted rules of grammar in order to secure a successful communication. In such a situation, however, one would be in a dilemma. For if a speaker or writer failed to secure a successful communication because he used a correct form of grammar, the language situation could not be regarded as satisfactory. It would fail in that the

necessary demand of utility had not been met. On the other hand, if his words produced the desired effect upon the hearer or reader but did violence to his own private judgment, this also could not be regarded as satisfactory. This dilemma merely indicates that some social situations may occur in which language cannot satisfactorily function, that language after all is only a feeble human invention. It also emphasizes the fact that the whole force of a speaker's or writer's language is not consumed in registering an impression upon some other mind, and this consideration leads over to the second test of good English. To be good, English must not only meet the practical demands of utility, it must also satisfy the inner sense of goodness of the speaker or writer.

In what does this inner sense of goodness consist? It is something different from utility, for utility has to do with the effective applications of language, and on the side of its external relations, especially with the bond of union between the speaker or writer and the rest of the world. Utility has its worldly side, its cold and calculating side, and it is likely to become too narrow and selfish to serve as an exclusive principle of action. No one can disregard utility, but no one wishes to employ his speech and his mind merely as instruments cunningly devised to secure immediate advantages. The part of human nature called into action in satisfying the demands of utility is mainly the intelligence. These intellectual aspects of good English are not unimportant. They include all those generalizations derived from the study of the language, all rules of correctness, all formulations of past habits, which may aid in the attainment of a more effective command of the language.

Supplementing the intellectual aspects of good English, however, certain more personal, more diffused, more emotional demands of good English must be taken into account. Membership in the social body carries with it not only the necessity of employing the language effectively in communication, but it carries with it also the privilege and the duty of the individual to discover just what place in the social body he wishes to occupy. Associations, groupings of interests, conflicts of interest, also, when interests clash, these are among the necessities of social life. The task of finding a satisfactory path among these many complications is one that, in justice to himself, the speaker and writer must undertake. Now justice always implies an act of judgment. Usually also it implies a choice between two or among more than two possibilities. When no question of choice arises, no act of judgment is necessary. We proceed along our customary way without troubling ourselves over decisions for the performance of each moment. Much the greater part of every person's share in the life of the language is carried on in this way. The common linguistic acts never rise to the level of conscious judgments. They are merely elements in the great underlying structure of the mother tongue which we possess by inheritance and by habit. And when certain details of this common body of English speech do rise into clear consciousness, then judgment is easy. No one has any difficulty in commending and accepting forms of speech such as *I am*, *you are*, and *he is*. These are the universal and unquestioned idioms of the speech. They are among those innumerable habits that give to all users of the speech their sense of linguistic community and identity.

At the other extreme certain judgments are likewise so readily made that the judgments are almost instinctive. These judgments are those which pass sentence of condemnation upon forms of speech which never have a place in the speech of the group of persons to which the seeker after justice belongs. Thus in any moderately cultivated English speaking community, *them* as a demonstrative adjective, *seen* as the past tense of *see*, or *went* as the past participle of *go* would be quickly disposed of and with little or no debate. Such crudities of speech do not raise in the mind of the person capable of considering them any doubts concerning the position which in justice to himself the lover of good English will assume with respect to them.

As one considers instances, however, the point of debate soon is reached. Perhaps *ain't* as a negative form of the present of the verb *to be* is not so easily disposed of. Partisans may even rise up who will engage to defend *ain't* before the bar of justice of the English language. Certainly brave defenders can be found for the frequently condemned but still living *don't*, as third singular present of the verb *do*. For *like* as a conjunction both the spoken and the written language supply evidence to aid him who should seek to justify this particular form of English speech. A famous battle-ground is *shall* and *will*. These are only a few examples among many. They have been chosen to illustrate the situations in which the genuinely significant acts of judgment in the use of the language must be performed. And in every instance of this kind reflection will show that something is to be said on both sides. For a question of justice will never arise unless the point of it is debatable. And herein lies the great dif-

ference between justice in language and justice in the legal sense of the term. Justice in language never debates the fact but only opinion and feeling with respect to the fact, whereas justice in a court of law is primarily concerned with the determination of fact. After the fact is determined, the way of the judge is comparatively easy, for the law of the land provides a prescribed method of treating facts. The task of the judge is merely to administer the law. In his capacity as judge, he represses his personal feeling and opinion with respect to the law. The law is not made by him, and whether he likes it or not, the law must be administered as given.

In language, on the contrary, complete responsibility for any decision is thrown back upon the individual. He has no formal code to follow, but he makes his code as he goes along. His choices in language are those of a free agent, and he is bound by no considerations except those of dealing honorably towards the language. But this demand of loyalty to the best in the language as he sees it, the lover of good English cannot escape. It is the second great test by which good English is known. We have pointed out in a previous chapter that any individual form of the language is known to be English, even if it is incorrect English, by the fact that it is felt to be English when it is employed in an English context and intended to be understood as English. But this feeling for the whole great commonwealth of the English speaking peoples is a different thing from the feeling for good English. The sense for good English comes in response to more intimate relations. It comes in response to those immediate experiences in which one feels that one is living the life of the language as it ought to be lived. Shall I use

ain't as a form of the verb *to be?* The final answer must rest upon my feeling of loyalty. After all the evidence is collected, after all the rules have been examined, after all the arguments for and against have been brought forth, something decisive remains beyond rules, argument, and evidence. This something is a combination of experience, aspiration, knowledge, and countless other human impulses too complicated to be disentangled. It is the feeling that gives one the assurance of being at home in the mother tongue. In the whole world of the English language there are many little worlds, and the little worlds are the ones in which every individual intimately lives. Only when men and women live faithfully and truly the life of the little worlds of the mother tongue does the life of the great world become possible. Hence the necessity of loyalty in seeking and cherishing the life of the world in which one would live. This loyalty is the personal complement to the mechanical demand of utility in language. English is good English when it meets these two requirements, when it adequately performs its work so far as the world at large is concerned, and when at the same time it begets in the heart of the speaker or writer the assurance that he has honorably exercised his privileges and his obligations as a free citizen in the commonwealth of the English language.

The impulse to look for the seat of authority for good English somewhere beyond individual impulse is seen therefore to be not only proper but necessary. Yet this outer authority exists not merely in the external world. It is not an authority with which the individual has nothing to do. It exists in fact only when the individual creates it, when he takes his just share in it. That it

calls for an infinite variety of adjustments, for a sensitiveness on the part of the individual to the subtleties of the social relationships in the midst of which his days are passed, is no argument against its validity. The achievement of good English is no trivial undertaking. Passable English is within the reach even of the indifferent and the negligent, but good English demands flexibility of temper and mind. It demands also a moral enthusiasm and determination to live the best of life as one sees it. It is the best corrective in the world for the hardening of the sensibilities which is only too often the accompaniment of the daily struggle for existence.

The danger of mere correctness as a guide to good English lies in the direction of a narrow and unsympathetic puritanism. But the lover of good English need not be a violent radical. He need not justify everything he sees and hears in the life of the language. He may indeed be as aristocratic and exclusive as he pleases in the quest for what he thinks to be good. Whether he tends towards radicalism or conservatism, however, always his conviction that what he chooses is good must rest not upon a rule of action delivered to him ready made, but on the realization that it brings him into a livelier and more sympathetic relation to those among his fellow human beings who exemplify the best in life as he sees it.

Neither is it an argument against this notion of loyalty as a test of good English that it is not readily reducible to positive laws. All of man's life is not controllable by a code — perhaps the best of it cannot be so controlled. Positive laws are useful mainly as protection against crimes and misdemeanors. In the realm of language, such crimes and misdemeanors are the crude blunders of

speech which can readily be legislated against, but which are of relatively little importance except in the elementary aspects of the use of the language. In the finer social adjustments we are not governed by formal regulations. In this realm we respond no less quickly to authority, but it is a diffused and often unexpressed sense of authority. To attempt to reduce these subtle relationships to formal regulation would result in destroying the life of them. The significance of vital relationships is that they are not formal, that they respond quickly to the needs and impulses of the living moment. The difficulty of reducing good English to a set of positive laws does not imply that good English is unregulated, that it is beyond authority. Neither does it justify a blind hope that everything will turn out for the best in the end, though how or why no one can tell. It does not justify a mystical faith in the goodness of things, including language, beyond human control. On the contrary, this difficulty brings home to us that the mind and the heart must be kept open to register impressions, and the will must be kept flexible to move one wherever one should go in this world of complicated moral impulses.

Nor is it, finally, an argument against the validity of loyalty as a test of authority for good English that it is based upon what we must call feeling more than upon reason. As man cannot live his life merely by law, neither can he live it merely by reason. After the observer has exercised all the powers of reason and intelligence he may possess upon an experience in language, the ultimate test of its goodness must lie in the fact that he accepts it and embraces it as satisfying the intimate sense of what he desires to be in relation to himself and in relation to

others. The reason and the judgment may go astray, but less often the feeling. Undoubtedly feeling may also prove fallible, since nothing human is perfect. One may have the conviction of having said or written exactly the right thing, only to experience the mortification of discovering that others have not taken it so. Humiliating as this experience may be, however, it is less humiliating than to have spoken or written without conviction, but with the same result. Truth to oneself is the primal necessity in the use of the language. Without personal truth, sincerity of social relationships is impossible. The supreme satisfaction in the use of language comes when it is found that this sense of personal truth carries over into a larger world where general experience confirms personal satisfaction. When this condition is realized, the seeker may be assured that he has found the final and sufficient rule for the use of good English.

XIV

THE PURIST ATTITUDE

THE term "purist" is an unlovely name for an unlovely kind of being. It applies broadly to any person who harasses himself or others by an unnecessary concern over the forms of speech. For the purist is one who pushes what might otherwise be a virtue to the point where it becomes a vice. He has a passion for perfection, but unfortunately also he often has a passion for discovering that others are not as near as he is to the goal of perfection. Such discoveries give great comfort to the purist, even when he supplies his own definition of perfection.

Though he always convinces himself that he means well, the judgments and attitudes of the purist often rest upon a foundation of which he may be utterly unaware. Perhaps no one sets out with the purpose of being so good as to be disagreeable. Ordinarily men and women are satisfied to be good enough, and there is likely to be an element of abnormality, of concealed motive and impulse, in a painful endeavor to be better than the situation demands. The psychology of this purist attitude is by no means peculiar to language. Perhaps all of us have certain similar mental eccentricities which are the result of earlier aspirations, prohibitions, and fears, and which express themselves at times in unexpected and seemingly remote directions. Very often such purist habits satisfy our need for action without involving us in a serious attempt to realize the ideal perfection which they supposedly

reflect in us. In these habits there is likely to appear a certain irrationality, though at the same time it is usually easy to see in them a basis of justification, so far at least as their origins are concerned, in necessity or expediency. A few illustrations from fields not connected with language may be useful as preliminary to the understanding of linguistic purism. In their mental background some of our fixed habits are strikingly similar to others with which they have no external connection.

Over-emphasis and nicety in special habits often manifest themselves early, even in the crotchets and perversities of children. This is a matter of common observation in the eating habits of children. In view of the way in which children must be trained, or at least usually are trained, it is no wonder that their minds sometimes take such whimsical twists. As soon as a child is able to grasp things with its hands, it begins to put them into its mouth, and just as soon parents and nurses begin telling it not to do so. To the little child the distinction between things good to eat and things not good to eat must be altogether obscure. But the child very early learns that there is something perilous and mysterious, something that may lay him open to punishment, in this matter of putting things into the mouth. As he grows older, he becomes a little more discriminating, and if he develops as a sensible child should, he puts things into his mouth which are good for food whenever he is hungry. But many children do not develop sensibly, and many sensible children have their queer moments. Even when they are hungry, or should be by all the laws of nature, and when good food is placed before them, they will balk at it for some trifling and insignificant reason, because of its

color, or the shape or texture of the particles, or often merely because it is strange. These are the reasons they sometimes give, but at bottom the real reason is something they cannot analyze. When a child really needs food and refuses to take it, more than likely he is merely the victim of those early lessons in correct eating, in repression and fear, which parents themselves have taught him. When parents begin to scold and insist, these repressions and fears become all the stronger, because the tones of voice in the commands by which the child is to be compelled to eat recall to him vividly those earlier commands by which he was prevented from eating. The child becomes over-conscientious, finicky, and whimsical about his food, and though exasperated elders may lay it all to stubbornness, there must be a reason even for stubbornness. The child has been taught to be good about his food, but so vigorously taught, that he is sometimes better than the circumstances require. A similar case is on record of a little girl of six who had an obsession for washing her hands. Even when they did not need washing, she scrubbed them. She refused to play games which would make her hands dirty, because black fingers threw her into a panic of fear and anxiety. The child had learned the lesson of cleanliness too well. She had failed to realize that cleanliness is a virtue only in so far as it enables one to get along comfortably in this practical world. Moments must arise for everyone when it is necessary to sacrifice the ideal of cleanliness in the interests of effectiveness in some other direction.

Grown-ups probably have a greater number of exaggerated habits than children, or it may be that their purist habits merely take forms that are more noticeable to their

fellow adults. In some adults of sensitive temper there develops a kind of mania for perfection. The stock example is the over-conscientious housekeeper, the person who wages a life-long war against dust, who has a place for everything and always has everything in its place, who is rendered miserable and unhappy if every chair in a room is not exactly in the position in which she knows it ought to be. But this mania finds many avenues of escape. It leads people often into careers for reforming the world — not of course the whole world in general, for the mania for perfection usually expresses itself in specialized directions. One hobby ordinarily provides sufficient relief. But for the reformer who must be up and doing, there is scarcely any limit to the number of choices. One directs his efforts against the cigarette, another against alcohol, another against customs of dress, and there are still foods, theologies, physic, politics, and other possibilities open to the reforming enthusiast. That there are many abuses in the world which should be corrected, no one would deny. But many of the persons who set about correcting abuses do so from no reasoned understanding of the conditions they would change. Their convictions that they are the chosen vessels of reform are not always the result of observation, but often are merely blundering attempts to satisfy the demand which they make upon themselves to be good and to do good. They want to be positive forces, though they may not always take the preliminary step of asking themselves if they are intelligent forces.

Language does not escape the notice of these reformers who suffer from the mania for perfection. The number of theorists who contrive schemes for the reform

of English spelling or who busy themselves with the invention of phonetic alphabets is beyond belief. It is true enough that there is room for improvement in English spelling and that phonetic alphabets have their uses. But the mad reformer has no realization of how his schemes are related to the facts of the language or how they are to be put into practical operation. Sometimes this mania for perfect system turns toward the notion of a universal language. Here again projects for universal languages are not without a certain interest, especially on the speculative side, but the proposal for a single, absolutely systematical language for all human beings in the present state of the world is the dream of a mad man. No doubt language is an imperfect human invention, and one can readily see how many things in any language could be made better, but intelligence as well as enthusiasm are necessary before the conditions as they exist can even be described. Perhaps no one pays much attention to the wild projects of cranks, but so-called educationists also often have these blind enthusiasms for improvement, and they are moreover in a position to do a greater amount of harm. It is one of the ideals of the profession of teaching nowadays that the speech of children must be improved. Speech improvement is one of the cant phrases of the day. Every teacher acquires the phrase, but too many put behind the phrase only a blundering, though earnest purpose to do their duty in the way of speech improvement. Without any clear realization of the nature of language or any understanding of the directions in which genuine improvements lie, ordinarily they select some small group of linguistic details upon which they expend infinite patience and discipline. Having acquired

a perfect command of these few details, they rest completely satisfied with their language as a whole — like the savage who feels that he is elegantly dressed when he has a squirrel's tail tied about his waist. The teaching of these details is often made highly dramatic and emotional. The points of speech in which the teacher's pupils are to be drilled are personified as demons — a politer word than devils, though it is made clear that it means the same thing. Then the hunt begins. The innocent children had never realized that they were inhabited by devils. The old devil had almost disappeared from our modern minds. But the teachers have found new devils. They rout them out of the children's very mouths, and make them caper before the children's eyes, filling the children's minds with a holy horror of their hitherto unrealized wickedness. What are these demons? For the most part they are merely variations of social convention in matters of speech which in themselves are utterly indifferent. One of these demons is the third singular present *don't*. The point is not whether *don't* is acceptable or not acceptable as a third singular present — opinion perhaps will be equally divided — but that whatever one thinks about it, the question is not important enough to justify all the zeal which often goes to the answering of it. Another popular demon is *can't* with the vowel of *cat*, and many other words like *past*, *dance*, *half*, with the same vowel, instead of the reformer's orthodox vowel of *father*. The Italian *a* is one of the strongholds of the blind reformers. One can often see their souls filling with holy satisfaction when they have succeeded in the practice of this virtuous pronunciation in some particular word. They use the pronunciation as a

kind of linguistic smirk, unaware that it is quite as ill-bred as a self-conscious simper on the countenance. Another demon is *ain't*, and this is a worse demon than either of the other two. Some teachers go so far as to call it a real devil. They acknowledge that this devilish *ain't* is a familiar companion of an extraordinary number of otherwise respectable people, but what is the use of being good if everybody else is equally good? And how can one reform, unless one reforms those things which other people are in the habit of doing?

Of course these remarks will not be taken as a defense of *I* or *he ain't* as better than *I'm not* or *He isn't*, or as a justification of *ain't* as good, when the question of social convention in speech is important. All they are meant to indicate is that it is wrong to fill people's minds, and children's minds above all, with violent and blind hatreds and fears of simple things that are a part of ordinary, natural experience. It is appalling when one thinks of the number of negative commands that are placed upon children in the years when they are acquiring the language, especially the years from five to ten. Before the age of five they are fortunately granted the privilege of speaking like babies. But when they begin to leave their lovable baby speech, they are told not to say this and not to say that, they are ridiculed and scolded, they are told that they must learn to speak like ladies and gentlemen, and their heads are filled with all sorts of fears and inhibitions. These things are all a part of their education. Now it is quite true that children must be educated, but when education turns into an exaggerated and violent reform of simple habits based on simple natural experience, all one can say is, Heaven help the little children.

The foregoing remarks have probably already suggested the question of first importance in this whole matter of conscientious effort in speech. The question is, Where does the golden mean lie? How shall we strike the proper balance between preciseness and heedlessness? Just because we may have some irrational economies, treasuring scraps of orange peel, like Dr. Johnson, saving old newspapers, hats, gloves, attic rubbish of all kinds, this is no reason for neglecting the virtue of economy altogether. Because some people suffer from the obsession of gentility to such a degree that they are in constant fear of contamination by association with their fellow human beings, this is no defense of crudity and vulgarity in social relationships. And because some enthusiasts cultivate mad theories of speech or promote unnecessary reforms, this is no reason why speech should be neglected altogether. The whole subject of speech cannot be dismissed with the simple statement that everybody should do and should be allowed to do what he wants to do. Speak naturally is the advice given by those who consider rules and discipline to be unnecessary. The less attention paid to rules, according to this opinion, the better becomes the language from the point of view of expressiveness, the greater its fluency and convincingness.

Perhaps something might be said for this theory as an ideal, and perhaps in very primitive linguistic communities people did say whatever they felt like saying, and permitted others to do the same. Some such conditions might exist in a highly homogeneous society, as primitive societies frequently are, mainly for the reason that no one person would ever be inclined to speak or act differently from the other persons in the community. But in a mod-

ern mixed society, the conditions are different. We must have a theory and a rule, even if it is only the theory and the rule that different members of the same linguistic group may justifiably differ in their linguistic practices. We may want to decide that one person may say *ain't* and another say *isn't*, yet neither suffer any loss of respect. And so far as speaking naturally is concerned, it must be remembered that nobody speaks naturally. Everybody speaks as he does because he has acquired a certain number of habits of speech, derived from his linguistic surroundings. If his surroundings had been different, his linguistic habits would have been different. Nor is fluency in itself one of the ultimate ideals of language. Many people have fluency in a very high degree, like Mrs. Lirriper in Dickens's *Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings*, but no one would think of holding them up for admiration. It is not well to be held in check by too many inhibitions, but a few inhibitions may be useful. Language is partly a physiological function, like walking, breathing, and chewing. Once the mechanism is started, it works almost of its own accord. Everybody acquires a body of linguistic habits, a capital of words and phrases which may be repeated so constantly that in the end the repetition becomes automatic. Conversation of this kind probably comes as near to being "natural" as language ever can be. But conversation of this kind is really a kind of disease of language, a dysentery of words that may make one a popular orator or merely a tedious bore, in short a practitioner in mere words without control or intelligence behind them. But such conversation certainly does not represent the art of speech at its best.

In a preceding chapter the point was made that one

important test of excellence in language is to be found in utility, and the point was also made that utility must be broadly defined to justify itself as such a test of excellence. All people do not try to do the same thing, and the same person at different moments tries to do different things. But whenever the question comes up of choosing one form of speech as contrasted with another, the principle may be safely applied of preferring that form which best serves a useful purpose in maintaining the expressive values for which language exists. The golden mean is to be discovered in the actual practices of speech as a living medium of expression, in speech controlled and directed by the intelligence. The same principle applies in the determination of one's general attitude towards speech, that is, to the determination of one's ideal. Always there should be a harmony between thought and intelligibility on the one side and the forms of language on the other. When the theorist applies rules and standards which are unrelated to thought and intention, he exaggerates the formal side of language. And of course thought and intention which never realize themselves in any intelligible formal expression cannot satisfy the demands of language. They are the necessary preliminaries to all sound use of language, but left to themselves, they are only too likely to evaporate in vague musing and day-dreaming. It is obvious also that the terms "thought" and "intention" cover a wide field. To the person struggling with a new or subtle notion, the choice or discovery of the proper words may be a matter of great importance. But even such simple things as formal conventions may have their value on the side of thought and intention, and though in themselves they may not be

weighty with meaning, if they are established conventions, they may not be violated unless the violation itself serves a useful purpose. Thus one may employ spellings like *relieve*, *leave*, but not *recieve*, *receave*, not because *recieve*, *receave* would mean anything different from *receive*, regarded merely as a word, but because accepted custom permits only *receive*. The following of accepted customs in formal conventions is not a mark of purism, but the intentional deviation from accepted custom is a mark of purism when the deviation has no value for the expressive use of the language. The spelling reformer who adopted the spelling *recieve* or *receave* would be a genuine purist. He would be moved by purely formal theories about language, not immediately by matters which have to do with utility and expressiveness. He might be an excellent philosopher or an eloquent advocate, but he would not be an artist, as every person must be who endeavors to establish a just harmony between the content and the forms of speech.

Instead of dwelling further on these general considerations, perhaps the better way of making clear the purist attitude will be to describe some general types or examples of purism. One of these of wide occurrence is the purism of pedantry. The characteristic of this kind of purism is the application of scholarly standards the values of which are determined not by an appeal to the language itself but to matters of information which lie outside the language. We would not deny that scholarship is an excellent thing, but only so when it is in its proper place. When the custom of the language has established a form of speech in general practice, only the pedant will seek to change this practice by an appeal to something outside the custom of

the language. There is of course plenty of work for the scholar to do in correcting those errors of ignorance which result from unfamiliarity with many of the customs of the language as they have been established. The person who thinks that *noxious* and *nocturnal* mean about the same thing, to whom the distinctions of meaning in *credulous*, *credible*, and *creditable*, in *council*, *counsel*, and *consul* are dark mysteries, is merely an unfortunate. He has not had an opportunity to become acquainted with certain matters of information which the more learned persons of every degree accept without question. Even college students write sentences like *A dog ran up and jumped on me so vociferously he almost knocked me over*, but a person who thinks *vociferously* and *impetuously* mean the same thing is only beginning his education, whether he be in the college or in the nursery. Here among these unfortunates is one field in which the scholar may labor as diligently as he will without laying himself open to the charge of pedantry. To be sure, some ignorant persons may be content to dwell in their ignorance. They may not care whether or not *noxious* and *nocturnal* mean the same thing. The person who is concerned about the distinction between *noxious* and *nocturnal* may seem to them a quibbler, a juggler with trifles, in other words a pedant. Now scholarship is undoubtedly to a certain degree relative, but not altogether so. Certainly the willfully ignorant person is not the one to say who is or who is not a pedant. The man who can put the pedant in his proper place is one who must more clearly realize the place which he himself occupies.

The more interesting and more debatable questions of scholarship in language are those concerning which per-

sons with the right to an opinion may differ in theory and practice. It is with respect to such questions that the task of finding the golden mean between pedantry and slackness becomes of importance. Usually the details of language which thus come up for judgment are themselves of a somewhat learned character. A certain degree of customary practice, or even a high degree, may have established itself in these details, but the scholar may be dissatisfied with this practice because it pays little heed to distinctions not present in practice which seem to him more important. Then it becomes a question of just how important these extraneous details are. An example is the word *coastal*. This word is in general use among geographers and geologists, who employ it in phrases like *coastal plain*, level land along the seashore, or *coastal subsidence*, the sinking of land along the shore. The objection to the word is that the suffix *-al* is of very obvious Latin origin, but *coast* is an anglicized word corresponding only remotely to the Latin word *costa*. The word *coastal* is therefore said to be a hybrid, and according to the reasoning of the purist a better form of the adjective would be *costal*. Unfortunately the word *costal* is not used, but *coastal* is very generally used by those persons who have occasion to use the word at all. How shall the matter be decided? To one who is not troubled by theories of etymological purity, the word *coastal* would seem to be very properly formed. It is made very naturally by taking the familiar word *coast* and adding to it the ending *-al*, which has become a familiar suffix. In fact the suffix *-al* is found in combination with other non-Latin words that even the most enthusiastic purist would hesitate to discard. The word *tidal*, as in *tidal wave*, for example,

is composed of an Anglo-Saxon word, the same word that appears in *time and tide*, and the Latin suffix *-al*. Then there are also the adjectives *racial*, *postal*, and *bridal*, though this last word complicates the matter still more. To the casual observation, it looks as though the phrases *tidal wave* and *bridal party* were syntactically very much alike. But etymologically *bridal* is not a hybrid at all, because the second element only looks like the Latin suffix *-al*, although in reality it is a worn-down form of the English noun *ale*. The word originally was *bride-ale*, with reference to the festivity accompanying a marriage. Nobody except an etymologist, however, could now see any difference between *bridal* and *tidal* with reference to the manner of their formation. The history of *bridal* as a word is interesting, and it is now inevitable that this history should be drawn into the discussion of the justification whether of *bridal* or of *tidal* or of *coastal*, or of any other adjective now used with the suffix *-al*. Moreover, if one discards *coastal* and *tidal* because they are hybrids, shall one go on and discard all the hybrids in the language? But many hybrid combinations have a history of hundreds of years of useful service behind them, words like *around*, *across*, *because*, and it would be absurd to think of disqualifying these words because of the manner of their formation. The battle against hybrid formations ordinarily centers about words of recent origin, like *bi-monthly*, *cablegram*, *coastal*, *racial*, *pacifist*, *speedometer*, and hosts of others that come into being in the midst of the smoke and din of the daily struggle for existence. These words often make their way very well in the practical world, though they sometimes look a little foolish when they are haled before the stern judge who sits in the still air of

his scholar's study. As an extreme example, some of the recent compounds with *pre-* may be mentioned. There are of course dozens of old and established compounds with *pre-*, words like *pre-natal, pre-occupy, pre-ordain, prepay, prepossess.* In these compounds both elements are of Latin origin, but the new compounds are different in that the second element is not Latin in origin or even scholarly in its coloring. Examples are words like *pre-war*, as in *We can never return to pre-war conditions; pre-school*, as in the phrases *the pre-school child, pre-school education; pre-iced*, as in *California fruit is now always pre-iced before it is shipped.* Obviously a word like *pre-iced* or *pre-war* is a most shocking hybrid, shocking, however, only to persons provided with sensibilities that may be shocked by it. To the person with a tougher linguistic hide, they seem words like any other words, and on the model of them, he will soon be speaking of *the continuance of pre-stoppage wages*, or of *pre-strike arrangements*, or of *pre-League Europe*, or of any other *pre-* situation which seems to him to be satisfactorily met by a word of this formation.

These various examples of questionable hybrid words have not been mentioned for the purpose of justifying them, but merely to provide an opportunity for stating what would seem to be the reasonable attitude of mind to assume in the endeavor to come to a decision with respect to the question of using them. The position here taken is that the most reasonable test of the right of a word or of any other form of language to a place in the language is to be found within the language itself. If a word serves a useful purpose, and if it moreover has extensively demonstrated its usefulness by doing its work as a word,

it has the final justification every word must have, whether it has ever been questioned or not. On the other hand, to question the right to existence of a word which is going about its serious business because of some supposed blemish in its origins is a pedantic impertinence. Words, like persons, justify themselves by what they do, not by any putative virtues in their ancestry. But if this position is accepted, there still remains the interesting question how the pedantic purist succeeds in putting himself in his peculiar frame of mind. Why should it ever occur to anyone that the validity of a form of English speech should be determined not by an appeal to English itself, but to something in Greek or Latin or French or some other alien language? The answer is that the purism of the pedant is merely an exaggerated and unintelligent application of one of his acquired habits of mind. The pedant usually begins his learning with a great respect for information about things that do not lie too near at hand. He does not aspire to be learned in familiar, but in remote and unexpected things. Yet the learned interests of the prospective linguistic pedant may not be so very remote after all, consisting usually of a certain acquaintance with Latin and French, and possibly with Greek. Since the great majority of English-speaking people have no acquaintance at all with Latin, French, or Greek, the knowledge of one or more of these languages provides some claim for distinction, that is, for relative distinction. And since, moreover, it is not so easy to be distinguished in those matters within the reach of the whole multitude, competition here being wider and keener, some choice but not notably vigorous spirits seek for their distinction in the exploitation of interests not accessible to the mul-

titude. Their affections and their pride being thus centered upon Latin or French or Greek, it naturally distresses them greatly when they find something in English which fails to correspond to the proprieties of these other languages in which they delight to feel themselves at home. Of course it does not follow that every person who devotes himself to the study of Latin, French, or Greek becomes a pedant. The well-balanced scholar may acquire immense stores of information in these languages, and still be able to keep his information in its proper place. The pedant is one who allows his scholarship to intrude where it does not belong, who may even persuade himself that the familiar features of his mother-tongue are infinitely improved when he gazes upon them through the prisms of his Latin, Greek, or French spectacles. The seeds of this kind of pedantry are often sown very early. Children are told to go to the dictionary for information about words which have lain about them since their infancy and which they might more profitably study by the method of direct observation. They are told to examine the etymologies of words that they have always used with perfect confidence, and as a result of this learned exercise, they are supposed to know the better the words they have thus studied. But it is questionable if this happy end is always attained. The child's mind may be merely burdened with some bits of irrelevant information which will have to be set aside when the moment of the actual use of the words arrives.

Somewhat akin to the pedantic purist is the literary purist. Here again it is not difficult to see how the literary obsession becomes fixed in certain minds. From almost the beginning of their education, children are trained to

have a high respect for literature. Teachers and parents alike devote a great deal of time to cultivating the literary taste of their charges. In the later years of school and college, the library becomes the center of the educational process. The path towards culture is made to lie for the most part through books, and an attitude of respect and reverence towards books is the very atmosphere in which the student breathes. Some students, it is true, seem to be almost completely immune to these influences. They come out from all this uplifting with no desire to read anything more literary than the sporting page of a newspaper. The loss is theirs, however, for they miss what might be an innocent source of amusement, and they miss also the mollifying effect which the knowledge of a culture wider than their own might have upon their characters. At the other extreme are those who take the lesson of appreciation of literature too seriously, and these are the ones who make literary purists. For them all the resources and the tests of culture are bound up in books. They develop an almost superstitious reverence for books, so much so that they cannot see the life which lies about them except as they interpret it in terms of something that they have read. What they see always reminds them of something else that they have not seen. They think in terms of Wordsworth, or Tennyson, or Jane Austen, or Fielding, or some other admired classic author. And so also when they come to speak or write, they are satisfied with the result only when they are assured that their speaking or writing is supported by the precedent of some revered master in the past uses of the language. The literary language they call the "real language," and all else, varieties of illegitimate perversion.

Now undoubtedly the study of classic authors may have a beneficial influence upon the development of a novice's style. This is especially true when the number of classic authors is relatively small and when they are intensively and carefully studied. This is the great advantage of the Greek and Latin classics, that they constitute a comparatively small body of literature with a clearly defined and fixed character of its own. If we were all agreed to study this, or any other small body of classics, no doubt we should all have a respectable and a fairly uniform literary style. This was indeed the result of the study of the classics in the admirable literary style of English writers in the eighteenth century. But there is a great difference between the careful and intelligent study of a definite body of classic writing and the vague and unintelligent respect for the whole, undiscriminated literary attitude of mind. And it is a curious fact that as the body of literature has increased in modern times, the number of those writers who stand in supreme position as authorities and models has diminished almost to the point of disappearance. In the earlier periods of formal standards no one questioned the worth of Cicero, Caesar, Livy, Vergil, Horace, and a few others as models for their respective kinds of writing. These great classics transcended the limits of time and place, but our modern classic writers are always thought of under just these limitations of time and place. Shakspere is the greatest master, but Shakspere belongs to his period and no one today would try to form his style on Shakspere. Dryden, Pope, Addison, Steele, Dr. Johnson are also classic writers in their degree, but again only so with many qualifications. As one approaches nearer to contemporary conditions, the number of classics, that is,

of accepted masters of English expression, becomes much greater, but at the same time it becomes less certain just what relative position each of these masters should occupy in any reasoned system of merit. There are so many of them and of such different values that the attempt to relate them in a scale of values becomes impossible. Instead of following the lead of recognized and accepted masters, the modern literary enthusiast is more likely to fill his mind with a vaguely remembered collection of literary phrases from a great variety of undiscriminated sources. He succeeds merely in establishing an attitude of mind, and though he may have the intent to be literary, he may yet be without any clearly perceived set of principles which will enable him to organize and to carry out effectively his literary inclinations. No wonder that the style of writing which results is only a rough caricature of literary style, like an image reflected in a badly silvered mirror. The following sentences taken from a *Bulletin* of the American Association of University Professors is a fair specimen:

"Correlative with the growing remoteness of administrative machinery is a tendency to indifference and, at times, impatience on the part of the college faculties to the consideration of matters of educational policy and administration. The source of this disinclination of college faculties to think about educational matters is not, I am convinced, based upon any real lack of interest in educational problems. It rather eventuates from a growing sense of the inconsequential character of their deliberations and decisions, and from the habits of mind which have been generated by the great specialization of knowledge in our time. Too often faculties have settled seemingly important instructional or curricular problems only to find the same problems confronting them on a later occasion and as recalcitrant as ever."

A style like this, which permits the writer of it to speak of a source which is based upon a lack, of this same source as eventuating from deliberations and decisions, of settling a problem, of settling seemingly important problems when he means seemingly settling important problems, and of being confronted by things recalcitrant, such a style can be corrected only by correcting the whole general habit of mind of the person who writes it. The simple thought contained in the passage is hidden in the misty cloud of words which the writer has half-remembered from his reading. For him the only hope of sanity lies in a return to the simplicities of nature.

This exaggerated dependence upon literary models shows itself not only in the general attitude of misguided writers but also in application to the details of speech. The extreme position has sometimes been taken that no form of English speech can be called good, can be said to have received the final stamp of approval, unless it has back of it the precedent of use by good writers. The attempt to carry out this standard inevitably results in what our day rightly regards as an excessive formality and self-consciousness in expression. Undoubtedly every person who becomes a writer forms himself in part through the study of other writers who have preceded him. The art of writing in English has honorable traditions, and probably no writer ever conceives himself as making a complete break with the past. Nor does any writer with a feeling for the art of expression attempt to form his style merely upon his observations of contemporary colloquial speech. A reasonable respect for the practice of other writers is quite a different thing, however, from the assumption that what one does in the present must

receive its authority from what others have done in the past. In reality, however, the literary purist does not attempt to put his theory into consistent practice. If he did, he would soon give up the art of writing altogether. Instead he follows the usual habit of the purist in fixing his attention on some comparatively few selected details of speech, and when he succeeds in justifying these, or condemning them, on the evidence provided by his chosen literary models, he proceeds for the rest to speak and write, as every person must, in a manner which he hopes will justify itself without support of any extraneous authority.

Most discussions of points in usage have been carried on mainly by means of citations from literary authorities. A collection of the books of this sort would fill a very respectable set of shelves. Yet the evidence, so laboriously collected, is inconclusive, both because the appeal to literary authority is not adequate to answer all questions of English usage, and because the evidence in most instances is divided. The truth is that for any construction or meaning in words which even a moderately experienced speaker or writer would feel inclined to use, precedents are almost sure to be found in reputable English writings. So much has been written and so great is the number of good writers that almost everything has been said in almost every way. When it comes to collecting authorities, therefore, the argument often weighs about equally on both sides of the scale. For example, by the test of literary authority, should one write *such a one* or *such an one?* Probably no speaker feels tempted to say *such an one,* but many authors do write the phrase. Out of thirty-eight authors, ranging from Shakspere to the pres-

ent, a patient collector has gathered sixty-five instances of *such a one.*[1] Out of twenty-four authors of the same range, he has collected forty-nine instances of *such an one.* The average is therefore about the same for the two groups. Moreover, eight of the authors use both forms, with the preference now for *such an one*, as in Browning, now for *such a one*, as in Tennyson. Perhaps the construction *such an one* is not a form of speech that a literary purist today would prefer to select as a test example of the validity of his methods. But any other instance of a genuinely divided use would show the same result. Split infinitive, dangling participle, constructions like *I never thought of Spencer* or *Spencer's saying such a thing*, *different than* and *different from*, these and dozens like them are usages in language that can be as convincingly supported as they can be rejected by the evidence of literary authority. Modern purist opinion is very firm against the use of *different than*, but as experienced a writer as H. G. Wells uses it freely. He writes, for example, in one of his prefaces, that a character of his "sees things from a different angle than did Mr. Polly," and a little later occurs the sentence, "They will have a different sort of strategy than the disorganization of political parties and subtler methods than sabotage schemes in cellars and the misdirection of honest discontent." [2] And at another place, Wells speaks of a "poor silly little handkerchief so soddened with tears that it soaked and dripped." [3] Do these examples prove that it is all right to use *different than* or to use *soddened* for *sodden?* They prove nothing

[1] Hall, *Studies in Usage*, p. 277.
[2] *The World of William Clissold*, Vol. I, p. ii, p. 189.
[3] *Ibid.*, I, 132.

of the sort, for the reason that the appeal to literary authority cannot in itself justify any use of language. The practice of one good writer and still more the concurrent usage of a number of authors constitute presumptive evidence in favor of the forms of language they employ, but the evidence itself of their usage is irrelevant to the central and determining principle of all living language. The appeal to literary authority in language is not unlike the appeal to fashion in matters of dress. What "they" are wearing, people will want to wear. If "they" are wearing green overcoats, green overcoats will be the right thing to wear. By the same sort of standard, what the literary "theys" are doing and have done, the conventional followers of literary fashion will want to do. For the most part conventional persons will not go wrong in thus following the fashion. They will at least be at peace with their own world. But they will not be intelligent creative artists in control of the active growing processes of the language they employ with such painful care for its propriety.

The literary purist suggests another type, that of the literal purist. The literal purist is one who has an exaggerated respect for the mere letters by means of which the visible forms of the language are recorded. As the knowledge of the proper use of these letters is acquired only with painful effort, it is not unnatural that a person who has learned how to spell should feel that the letters in the words he has spelled should be compelled to perform some kind of useful service. Ordinarily letters represent sounds, and when they do not, then the purist steps in with his theory and makes them do so. Thus he will insist that the *t* in *Christmas* must be pronounced or the

final *b* in *numb*. In the realities of current colloquial speech, no *t* is heard in *Christmas* and no *b* in *numb*. Even when *numb* is compared, it is pronounced as though it were spelled *nummer, nummest*. But the literal purist has his eye fixed upon his theory, and not upon the realities of current colloquial speech. It is one of the difficulties of his position, however, that he can keep his eye fixed upon only a few exemplifications of his theory. Thus he may fret himself over the pronunciation of *Christmas* without a *t*, but not over the silent *t* in the similar phonetic combination of *listen, hasten, whistle*, and dozens of other words. Or he may pronounce *often* with a *t*, but neglect the *t* in *soften*. Manifestly, however, if the literal purist were consistent, he would make life a burden even to himself. He compromises by being better than his neighbors only in a few particulars, but since he attaches sacred meaning to these particulars, they satisfy his personal conviction of superior excellence and enable him to live otherwise like a normal member of society. Manifestly the simple rule to be followed in this matter of pronunciation is to accept what general custom has established in pronunciation, even when the written forms of the language do not correspond. Speaking and writing have become two very different things in English. Each has its own demands and justifications, and the principle that one should spèak as one writes, or the contrary principle that one should write as one speaks, can be applied in practice only by the purist who is under such a powerful conviction of the necessity of reform that he is willing to disregard the character of the language as it exists.

Another kind of purism might be called the purism of

the schoolroom. We start in life as extremely tractable beings, and though we may rebel against many things later, nevertheless not a few of the early lessons we have learned stick to us in spite of ourselves. We remember and put into practice many an early rule that we have learned without ever submitting it to a critical examination. This is especially true of rules of language, because few people are ever compelled to take serious account of their language. Life and death, or bread and butter rarely depend upon any matters of language that can be disposed of by academic rules. Fortunately most people readily forget the dogmatic rules they have learned, but with many, the habit of docility, and in consequence the conviction of righteousness, often persists surprisingly. Still more surprising is the number of these dogmatic rules that have accumulated during the long years of academic tradition and that are passed on from one generation to the next without any inquiry into the question whether or not they are worth passing on. The moss-grown superstition that sentences must not end with prepositions is one of these survivals. Another rule of the schoolroom that bears only slight relation to the conditions of actual speech requires *so* as the introductory word in the first term of a comparison after *not*, as in *The Greek soldiers were not so well trained as the Roman*, instead of *not as well trained*, this latter being the universal custom in spoken English and the almost universal custom in written English. Another equally meaningless survival, which nevertheless many grammarians, rhetoricians, proof-readers, and other sticklers for particular points of propriety hold on to religiously, is the rule that the relative *whose* must have for its antecedent only the

word for a person, or something thought of as a person, not the word for an inanimate object. Thus a sentence like, *In a tangle of shrubbery stood a weatherbeaten house, whose gloomy exterior gave little promise of our finding comfort and welcome within*, according to this rule, would have to be recast to read, *In a tangle of shrubbery stood a weather-beaten house, the gloomy exterior of which gave little promise of our finding comfort and welcome within.* Nevertheless endless examples of sentences in which the antecedent of *whose* is an inanimate object can be found in writings of high repute, and only a mechanical stylist would think of always replacing *whose* in such sentences by *of which.* A feeble defense can be made for the rule on the ground that *whose* is the possessive form of *who*, and the antecedent of *who* is always a person. The neuter, however, has no possessive form of its own. If the language had a possessive *whiches*, and if one could say *whiches gloomy exterior*, perhaps *whose* as a neuter possessive would never have come into use. But a neuter possessive is so obviously needed that the extension of *whose* for this purpose should be counted a virtue, not a defect in the language. A formal rule which prevents ease and flexibility and adds nothing to intelligibility is merely an encumbrance on the language.

Many of these dogmas of the schoolroom have had a surprisingly long life. The grammarians and rhetoricians of the eighteenth century are responsible for the existence of a great number of them. The task of school-mastering the language was undertaken with great zeal at this time, and very frequently rules were formulated apparently for no other purpose than that of providing for literature a set of technical limitations which should distinguish the

style of literature as a specialized art from the style of the normal idioms of the language as they were established by general custom. Such a movement might have gone very far, and might have produced in the end a literary style which occupied a completely detached and separate position in relation to the other uses of the language. But English literary style has always resisted this tendency. The great body of the uses of the language is the same for all persons, whether they aspire to be literary artists or whether they use the language more or less blindly as the spirit moves them. The sensible person rests content within this body of the great central uses of the language, and it is only the shallow and mechanical stylist who conceives that he can acquire distinction in style by the application of a few ornaments and tricks of technique which at the best can only make him formally different at occasional moments.

The emotional attitudes which accompany these various purist convictions are no less interesting than the principles upon which the convictions are supposed to be based. There is first of all the derisory attitude of those simple-minded persons who find nothing so absurd as the blunders and slips of the tongue of their linguistic companions. A little more subtle is the mood of superior but private amusement of the man of polite breeding. This is the mood specially of the scholarly purist, of the one who possesses the comparatively rare information that *amphora* should be stressed on the first syllable and not on the second, but *ampulla* on the second and not on the first, that *stigmata* must take the stress on the first syllable, that *precedence* invariably takes it on the second syllable, that *ex ca'thedra* is right and the general pronunciation

ex cathe'dra is wrong, that *nomad* is pronounced *nŏmad*, not *nōmad*, that *pariah* is pronounced *pā'riah* and only ignorantly *parī'ah*, that *primates* as a term in zoölogy is pronounced *primā'tēs* and not as people usually do pronounce it, that *parallelepiped* is pronounced *parallelĕ'piped* and not *parallelepī'ped*, that *centenary* should be pronounced only *centē'nary* and not *centĕ'nary*, and so with dozens of other niceties of speech that are likely to be the scholar's special property. Of course the scholar purist does not expect that everybody shall know all these matters that mean so much to him, but he is amused nevertheless at the simplicity of the world in which his fine distinctions play no part. Perhaps his is a harmless amusement, and it has at least the advantage of being susceptible of indefinite extension. It would be possible to add to the stock of these private satisfactions to the point where the scholar purist lived in a state of perpetual amusement and wonder at the ignorance of the world about him. When he reached this point, however, he would probably find himself in the position of Falstaff, not only witty in himself, but the cause that wit is in other men.

Advancing in the direction of seriousness, the next mood of purism is that of prudery, the fear of the simple and natural. Prunes and prisms propriety is a form of defense readily assumed by weaklings who feel the need of permanent protective habits. Still more serious is that temper or mood which appears in what might be called the purism of priestly caste. This is the mood of those persons who have convinced themselves that they are of the elect and that the welfare of the speech lies in their hands. What will become of the language, they ask,

unless our small band of chosen spirits, unless we who know, guide and direct it? These purists take their mission very seriously, much more seriously on the whole than the vast multitudes whose activities they would direct take it. The processes by which they convince themselves that they are rightly numbered among those of the priestly caste must always remain dark to outsiders. But it seems to be true that people have the conviction of sin — in others, — and of righteousness — in themselves, as often in matters of language as they do in other complications of human relationships.

Now that a few of the different types of purist attitude have been set forth as illustrations for the opportunity they afforded of condemning and rejecting this whole way of thinking about language, the reader may well ask in conclusion that some proper and commendable attitude of mind towards language shall at least be indicated by way of contrast. How shall one think about language if one does not want to be either a purist or a sloven, but merely a sensible well-regulated speaker and writer? The statement with which we began was that the purist is one who pays too great heed to the forms of language, and by implication this statement carries with it the principle that there is something more important in language which must not be sacrificed to merely formal demands. This something is that sense of intelligibility, of sympathetic communication, of satisfying self-realization which is always present when the activities of speech are carried on happily and successfully. This is the larger thing which justifies the invention of speech and which is the reason for existence of those forms by means of which it is realized. The normal attitude is there-

fore one which leads the speaker or hearer, the reader or writer, to put himself into harmonious relations to this larger purpose. One must strive first of all to hear others as they would be heard and to understand them as they would be understood. Every moment in our use of language depends so much for its successful issue upon our willingness to understand that without this willingness no practicable use of speech would be possible. The first necessity therefore requires that we shall not take speech as something which must first satisfy our personal demands on the side of its formal character before we shall regard it as a possibly intelligible or acceptable act of communication. If it should happen, however, that our sense of harmony and complete absorption in the human situation for which speech exists is disturbed in spite of ourselves by something in the mere form of the communication, good manners demand that as far as possible these disturbing elements shall be set aside as merely personal variations. We do not require in other social relationships complete correspondence to our own code of procedure, nor should we demand it in speech. Common politeness requires that we shall permit others to do things in their own way within reasonable limits. Just when the limits of reason are passed is of course an important matter, and undoubtedly different persons will set different limits. But we may say as a general principle that the limits of reason are passed, that one moves out of the region of polite negligible variation, as soon as something in the forms of language disturbs the sense of completeness and harmony in the language situation so shockingly that it cannot be restored. When this point is reached, however, a new language situation has been

produced, and what had been before merely a form of the language becomes weighted with a special and often unintended meaning of its own. At that point we then have to do not with purely formal matters, but with a great variety of general associations, with prejudices, preferences, and all the texture of habits by which one establishes oneself in a harmonious social grouping. It seems in the end, therefore, that merely formal matters are never of any significance in language. So long as we can, we disregard any variations that may occur, in the interests of politeness and of fullness of understanding. When we can no longer disregard them, they then cease to be merely formal matters and become instead the most deeply significant parts of the situations in which they arise. But the thoroughgoing purist knows nothing of these qualifications. To him the forms of the language, as he sees them, are sacred in themselves, and neither politeness, nor intelligibility, nor frailty, nor any other human virtue or weakness will avail to soften his stern decrees.

XV

THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF ENGLISH

It is the purpose of this and the immediately following chapters to indicate the character of the information the student accumulates who wishes to ground himself in the knowledge of English from the historical point of view, and to point out how he is to go about acquiring this information if he has it not. First of all, a clear division should be made between matters which are of collateral interest in the history of the language, and matters which have to do with the actual details of the language itself. These matters of collateral interest are of importance for filling in the background of the history of the language, but obviously the history of the language cannot be written merely in terms of background. The background may help to explain what happened and it may make more vivid the human surroundings of the language in its several stages. But for the history of the language itself it is necessary to turn to the specific and individual facts of linguistic experience.

The background of English is to be discovered in the ethnological, political, and cultural history of the English speaking peoples. It is of some interest to the student of language to know the race origins of the many peoples who have spoken the language, and also to know the relations of these English speaking peoples to other races with whom they have come into contact. The very beginnings of this ethnological history are obscured by

the lack of records for the periods antedating the time of writing, and for the most recent times, ethnological history is almost as much obscured by the extraordinarily complicated mixing of peoples and races which has taken place as the result of many cross currents of migration. In between occurred some interesting episodes which figure largely in all accounts of the ethnology of the English people, the coming of the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons to England, their relations to the Romans and the Celts, the invasions of the Scandinavians from the eighth to the eleventh centuries, the Normans and their conquest, but after that, not much of importance until the modern commercial and industrial migrations began. But neither the coming of the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, nor of the Scandinavians nor of the Normans, was in itself a linguistic event. Each of these moments in the history of the English people had important consequences for the language, but the proof that they had, or that any other race contacts affected the language, must always be made in terms of the language itself. Historical ethnology must therefore always be interpreted linguistically before it can be linguistically significant.

Political and cultural history are likewise interesting for background but are still less directly attachable to language. The births and deaths of kings, even the fall and rise of governments, may all take place without affecting in the slightest the deep-seated popular activities of speech. Battles may be won and battles may be lost, but the speech goes on forever. Indeed the chief value of political history, so far as language is concerned, lies in the definite chronological perspective it provides for the arrangement of linguistic detail. When Alfred

was king, how did Englishmen write and speak? And how great is the gap, chronologically and linguistically, between the English of Alfred and the English of Harold? It would be a great loss not to have these definite names and persons to which we may attach linguistic detail. Language tends only too readily to become an abstract and arid subject for speculation, and any associations that keep it within sight of its living human connections should be cherished. For this reason, also, the cultural background of the English people should be examined, both for the direct and the indirect light it throws upon the language. Manifestly cultural conditions may have a great deal to do with determining the character of a language. The language of a seafaring people will be more nautical than the language of a pastoral people. If the English people had remained as they were at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period, a people whose interests never went far beyond war, religion, and the business of daily living, if they had known nothing of the grace, the fancy, and the other qualities of lightness and variety which came in through the French in the several centuries following the Conquest, no one can doubt that the English language today would be very different from the language as we know it. Yet here again the point must be made that if cultural surroundings are to be taken as linguistically significant, they can be shown to be so only by evidence drawn directly from language itself.

The reading of histories, whether ethnological, political, or cultural, for the sake of background, is not an exercise that ordinarily calls for any special or technical preparation. Most cultivated persons have acquired the habit of reading history of this kind. The situation is different,

however, with respect to the history of language. Relatively few people acquire the habit of reading this kind of history at all, and those who make the effort, approach the undertaking with so few associations with the details of linguistic history that the process of acquisition is often laborious and painful. But obviously the person who wants to know the linguistic history of English, and not merely the background of this history, cannot escape the discipline necessary to make him an intelligent follower of a narrative couched in terms of linguistic detail. How should the reader set about the task of acquiring this necessary discipline? By reading the histories that have been written, would seem at first thought to be the simple and sufficient answer to this question. And undoubtedly the histories will be a great help, the elaborate ones for those who have made progress, the briefer and simpler for those who are taking their first steps. Yet the mere recommendation to read histories does not cover the whole situation. It does not cover the situation, because every student of historical English should be not merely a reader of history, but also an investigator in original sources. The same demand is not made upon the student of political and other kinds of history. A student who is interested in the French revolution would not expect to be asked to become a first-hand investigator in the documentary evidence upon which a history of the French revolution must be based. Instead he reads the best history of the French revolution he can find and rightly feels when he has done so that he has lived up to the possibilities open to him. But language is a different matter. The student of the French revolution whom we have imagined never took any active part in the French revolution, but

every person who sets out to study the history of his native speech is a living part of that speech. He knows more about the speech at first hand than any investigator of historical events, no matter how learned he may be, can possibly know about something that happened fifty, seventy-five, or a hundred years ago. Moreover the records upon which a history of English is to be based are open to every student more abundantly and conveniently than the records of any past event in political history can be. Within the compass of a half dozen volumes, records could be assembled that would go a long way toward providing materials for the historical study of the language throughout the ten centuries of its historical existence. To fail to examine this material as a direct source of information would be to neglect both an obligation and an opportunity.

As an accompaniment, therefore, to the reading of histories of the language, the reading of original texts cannot be too highly recommended. The value of the reading of texts lies in the fact that texts bring us closer to the actual living words of past times than any other method of approach can do. Texts themselves must always be interpreted, for the written word is never a perfect reproduction of the speaking voice. But lacking any way of hearing again the spoken words of past generations, we can at least guess with approximate exactness how spoken words then sounded by means of a critical examination of the written records past generations have left behind them. Texts should be read, therefore, in forms as near to the originals as it is possible to arrive. If one would read Shakspere for the light Shakspere's English sheds upon the history of the language, it would

be a waste of time to read Shakspere in modernized versions. It is true that even the earliest texts of Shakspere are not autograph copies of Shakspere's own language. They represent the language of his day, however, and though they may not record the actual forms of his words in all instances as Shakspere wrote them, nevertheless Shakspere would have recognized the contemporary editions of his plays as infinitely nearer his speech than our modernized versions. So also the historical student must read Middle English texts in the forms represented by the manuscripts in which they are preserved. As the central stage in the development of the language, midway between the oldest forms of the language in Anglo-Saxon and the modern character of English as it began to be established in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Middle English supplies the most instructive body of material for the historical student to work with. In Middle English, the student observes a great variety of language changes in operation. This was the period during which the English language was in its most fluid state. In the language of Chaucer, Middle English acquired somewhat the character of a standardized speech, but the historical student will not stop with Chaucer. He will examine other Middle English writings, those of a less learned and literary kind, as well as the better known monuments of Middle English literature. And finally a reading knowledge of Anglo-Saxon must also be counted among the minimum requirements of the historical student of English. The reading knowledge of Anglo-Saxon is regrettably among the rarer accomplishments of students of English. Courses of study in schools and colleges make elaborate provision for Greek

and Latin, but often little or no opportunity is given to the student for acquiring Anglo-Saxon. The defense of Greek and Latin is often made that these languages introduce the student to a body of literature that ranks with the world's best, whereas Anglo-Saxon literature in comparison is both meager and insignificant. But it remains to be proved that Greek and Latin, as they are ordinarily read, really do beget in the students who pursue these subjects a genuine appreciation of the literary qualities of classical literature. What students usually get is a little Latin and very much less Greek, a mere smattering of information that is as likely to be a hindrance as it is to be a help to them. So far as Latin is concerned, its usefulness for the student of English lies almost entirely in the field of etymology, in the study of the meanings of words. But etymology is only one of the aspects of language, and, on the whole, not the most significant for the student who wishes to know how language in its general structure changes and grows. There seems to be no valid reason, moreover, why the foreign traditions which have attached themselves to the English language should be studied and the more fundamental native tradition be neglected. The student who has Latin, French, and Greek will frequently find them useful in his study of English, but his knowledge of English is bound to remain incomplete and fragmentary if he has no acquaintance with those basic traditions of the language which are preserved for us in the records that date from the periods before and immediately after the Conquest.

The mere reading of texts will not in itself provide the student with a systematized and organized view of the

development of the language. To secure such a view it is necessary to arrange and classify the phenomena of language as they appear in texts under general heads and principles. A pioneer would do this by taking the texts, observing the facts for himself, and then arranging these facts under the principles which in his judgment best explained them. But this would manifestly be a long and laborious undertaking, and fortunately it is not now necessary for every historical student thus to take a fresh and independent start. The pioneering work in the history of the English language has long been done, and the results of it have been set forth in the many admirable histories of the language now available. With the histories as aids, the student should be able to organize his information under several clearly defined heads. First and easiest of all would come the study of words or vocabulary as the body of linguistic detail offering the least resistance. Words are readily detachable from their context, and as meaning in words is a part of general experience, changes or developments in meaning can usually be followed without the application of any highly technical methods. After words the student would turn his attention to form or structure, and here he would have under observation details not quite as obvious or simple, but nevertheless susceptible of definite organization. After structure would come the sounds of the language. The systematic study of English sounds is not work for novices, and in fact it can be carried on satisfactorily only by the student who is willing to discipline himself in a somewhat technical method of procedure. Nevertheless it is the most rewarding of all the ways of approach to the study of the language, and neither the study of vocabulary

nor the study of structure can be prosecuted to its end without calling in the aid of the student of sounds.

Background, vocabulary, structure, and sounds will provide an abundant body of material in the history of the English language with which the student may occupy himself, but whether he will or not, the student is sure to find that he cannot keep entirely within the limits of the English language. Inevitably he will be led to raise questions which have to do with the relations of English to other languages. These questions might lead him very far and might suggest to him the advisability of becoming acquainted with many different languages that in the beginning of his studies seemed very remote from the interest of one concerned primarily with the English language. The implications of this comparative study and of the other kinds of historical study of English that have been briefly indicated in this chapter will be set forth in somewhat fuller detail in the chapters that follow. The topic may be left for the moment with the observation that though the remote associations of English cannot be disregarded, it is not necessarily the aim of all historical study of language to carry words back to Indo-European or other very early origins. The historical student need not wait to begin his investigations until he has command of Gothic, of Latin, Greek, and Sanscrit. History lies at his very doors. What happened yesterday is no less historical than what happened three thousand years ago, and this contemporary kind of history is often more convincing than ancient history because the details of it are more directly under control. A good deal is to be said in favor of the principle of proceeding from the better known to the less known. The student who observes

that the word *lord* is now obsolescent, surviving mainly in religious use and in titles, although the corresponding feminine *lady* still maintains a vigorous existence, has here an interesting theme for research and speculation which may be carried on without venturing into those hazy theories of the lord as the bread keeper and the lady as the bread kneader. Science, business, politics, all the interests of the day are influences which continually modify the character of the language, occasionally by introducing new words, more often by changing the content of old words. And a competent understanding of what takes place in the language more immediately under our observation would seem to be one of the safest guards against misapprehension of what may have taken place in times and circumstances which can be reconstructed only through processes of remoter inference.

XVI

WHAT IS GRAMMAR?

Everybody has studied English grammar and therefore anybody ought to be able to say what it is all about. But these practical experiences, not always happy, do not necessarily imply an intelligent understanding of the nature of the subject. The truth is that English grammar, in spite of the fact that it has been taught to successive generations of English speaking youth for nearly three centuries, is still a much debated and uncertain matter, as to its proper content, as to its purpose, and as to the manner in which it should be presented.

The traditional school-book definitions of grammar do not get very far. Some of them define grammar as the science of language — a broad and comprehensive but vague description. Or English grammar is often said to be the science which tells how to speak and write the English language correctly. But this definition is manifestly too narrow. It assumes that any English which is not correct has no grammar. On the strength of this assumption, the assertion is sometimes made that it is improper to attach the adjectives good or bad to the words "English grammar," for when a form of English is grammatical, it is by that fact good and correct. The phrase "bad grammar," by the same reasoning, would be a contradiction in terms, for if English is bad, it cannot be grammatical.

The word "grammar" has had so many and so varied

applications that a glance at them will offer the best approach to the meanings of the term as applied to the study of language. One of the strangest developments in the word is that which causes it to be employed to designate subjects which have nothing to do with language. Thus books have been published which have been entitled grammars of music or painting or architecture. A well-known treatise bears the title The Grammar of Science. These uses illustrate one meaning of the word as the name for a systematic outline of the elements of a subject, whether the subject be language or any other form of human intellectual interest.

The sense that has just been described is not, however, the original or early sense of the word "grammar." In its origins the word goes back to Greek, to the element which appears in *telegram*, *program*, and words of similar composition. This element is a variant form of another word which appears in English *-graph*, as in *telegraph*, *graphic*, and the primary sense of both was that of the English word *write*. The subject of grammar as it was first developed by the Greeks and Romans was concerned with only the written aspects of the language. It was a learned subject and it was useful mainly to those persons who were professionally occupied with the transcribing and correction of manuscripts.

After the classical period, the term "grammar" continued in use in medieval and early modern times, but again with a change of meaning. To the medieval world, the treasures of knowledge seemed all to be locked up in the languages of the ancient world, especially in Latin. The study of Latin became thus the most important and most necessary part of the education of a medieval scholar,

especially the Latin of the great writers of Latin literature, Cicero, Vergil, Caesar, and a small group of other writers. As Latin was not the native tongue of the students in the monasteries of medieval Europe who gave their time to the mastery of it, naturally they were in need of books of direction and rules to assist them. To supply this need, numerous grammars to teach Latin to people who knew no Latin were written. The term "grammar" thus tended to take on more and more the specific sense of Latin grammar, and since Latin was acquired through the study of grammar, in the end, the sense simply of Latin itself. Thus Chaucer's little choir boy in the Prioress's Tale, though he knows how to sing the Latin song, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, sings it only by heart, with only a general knowledge of its meaning. When asked to translate the song, he explains that he has no grammar, no Latin,

"I singe song but can but small grammere."

This sense of the word still lingers in the name for certain schools known as grammar schools. These schools were originally schools in which Latin was the chief subject of instruction, the purpose of them being to prepare students for the universities. The three main divisions of the older school system were the elementary school, the grammar school, and the university. The name for the grammar school also survives in the name for the modern grammar grades, which are the grades just above the elementary grades, and the ones in which, in former days, the study of Latin would have been the principle concern. As the modern school is organized, however, the term "grammar," meaning Latin, if appropriate anywhere,

would be more appropriate to the high school than to the so-called grammar grades, where it persists as a meaningless survival.

One other older use of the term "grammar" may be noted in the broad meaning embracing all classical scholarship and literature. This meaning is illustrated in the title of Browning's poem, *The Grammarian's Funeral.* The grammarian of the poem is not merely a student of the formal elements of Greek and Latin, but he is a scholar and a lover of the beautiful in literature as well. In his notion, however, all scholarship and all beauty are contained only in the Greek and Latin languages. The term *grammarian* in this poem is a synonym for *humanist.*

From this older conception of grammar as primarily the study and knowledge of the learned Latin tongue has come the modern word *glamor.* This word is the same word in origin as *grammar,* with what was in the beginning a popular mis-pronunciation of *l* for *r.* The word means a false or deceptive appearance, the kind of appearance which only the worker of magic could throw over objects. Now as workers of magic, practitioners of the black arts, in the older belief, were always scholars, and as Latin, the language of scholarship, was pre-eminently the language of magic and incantation, it was easy enough for the word "grammar" or *Latin,* to take on the meaning of *glamor,* or magic. A variant form in the same development, now not commonly used, is the word *gramarye.*

These observations on the earlier uses and meanings of the term "grammar" are of interest to the student today because they have bearing upon several important characteristics of the modern significance of grammar. The first is, that much in the modern notion of grammar is

merely traditional survival from older notions. Just as we call certain grades of our schools grammar grades, though they may have nothing at all to do with Latin grammar and comparatively little to do with any kind of grammar, so we have in various other ways inheritances from older terminology and meanings which are no longer appropriate to changed conditions. The older meanings of the term "grammar" should serve to emphasize the point that grammar is no longer, as it was in earlier days, the exclusive term for Latin or classical grammar. The approach to scholarship and literature is not now made only by way of the classical languages. One of the greatest changes that has taken place in the whole history of thought is that awakening or renascence of the earlier modern period as the result of which men turned from the exclusive contemplation of the learning and language of the ancient world to their own native tongues and their own native possibilities. The notion of English grammar, the notion that it is practicable to write a grammar of a vernacular speech, is one of the achievements of the modern world. The first English grammar was written by Ben Jonson about the year 1600. The earliest English grammars followed closely the older Latin grammars as their models, and, as has already been pointed out, it cannot be denied that the English grammars in use today are still under the influence of the older Latin grammars of the schools. But this older influence is in the main a blind survival. English grammar has not yet fully attained its independence in the sense that it is based directly and exclusively upon the facts of the language which it attempts to describe, though this is what it purports to be.

One important consequence of the changed point of view of modern grammar is that the modern subject is immensely more comprehensive than the older notion of classical grammar. For if grammar meant only the rules of the use of the language as the language was illustrated in a few selected classical authors, Cicero, Vergil, Horace, Caesar, Tacitus, and a few others, then grammar was easy to write. The material was not only limited, but it was also static. In it there existed none of the countless variations and uncertainties which characterize all living speech. Moreover, grammar as thus conceived had to do only with written language and made no provision for the animation and the adaptations necessary in colloquial discourse. Erasmus describes the perfect grammarian, that is, humanist, as writing in the seclusion of a high tower, surrounded by all his dictionaries, phrase books, and other helps, and producing, after much labor, a composition in which every single word, every single inflection of any word used, was based upon the authority of the same word and the same inflection in Cicero.

Nothing more different could be imagined than the modern conception of grammar. For modern grammar takes not a limited group of authors, but the whole life of the language as its province. Modern grammar considers not only the written or literary form of the language, but it embraces also the spoken uses of the language. It limits itself not to a particular classical period, but it covers the whole life of the language, present as well as past. It examines not only the approved and standard and correct forms of speech, but also those which are present on other levels of the speech. In short, grammar as it is conceived in the modern study

of the subject, looks upon language as one of the important evidences of human culture and endeavors to understand and to explain it as such. In inclusiveness, therefore, it extends to the very limits of the language. Anything in the language that is susceptible of being reduced to a systematic and orderly statement is the material of grammar. This would include the study of words, of inflections, of the sounds of speech, of syntax and the ordering of words, of many things which no grammar has yet attempted to reduce to complete systematic statement, such as the rising and falling of the voice in connected speech, or the means by which the qualities known as style are attained in speaking and writing.

Obviously, however, the whole life of the language as the province of grammar states an ideal, not a simple program for practical achievement. But in thus assuming an all-embracing attitude towards its subjects, grammar does not differ from the other sciences. Botany takes as its field of interest all that can be known about all the plant life of the world, and zoölogy and biology are similarly comprehensive with respect to all animate life. None of these sciences can hope to exhaust all the material included within the theoretical definition. They are rightly defined in this broad way, however, because the only attitude for the scientist to assume is that he will exhaust all the possibilities of his subject so far as the limitations of human time and endeavor permit. The subject cannot be limited, though human nature must be. And so the English grammarian takes as his field for systematic examination and statement, the whole of the life of the English language, of the past, so far as he is able to discover it, of the present, so far as his vision is

keen enough to observe it. He cannot exhaust this field, but only by keeping his eye upon the whole of it can he realize to some extent its possibilities and limits.

The endeavors of students to reduce the whole life of the English language to orderly statement have been governed in the main by three different types or manners of investigation. Other approaches are conceivable, and perhaps in time students of grammar may devise new methods to attack those elements in the life of the language which have not yet been brought under systematic observation. The mass of accumulated scholarship with respect to English grammar may best be considered, however, by regarding it from the three points of view in method which are present in it. The first method is that of Comparative Grammar, the second is that of Historical Grammar, and the third is that of Descriptive Grammar. The names for these different kinds of grammatical study indicate fairly well the nature of them. Comparative grammar compares two or more languages which seem to stand in some relationship to each other and which exhibit resemblances not merely accidental, and by the accumulation of evidence of this kind, seeks to explain both the character of the relationship which exists between the languages and the manner in which the elements common to the several languages have taken the forms which are characteristic in each. Historical grammar is concerned with the facts of a single language, and the endeavor of it is to explain the later forms of a language in relation to the earlier forms of which they are successive adaptations. Descriptive grammar takes a language at a given moment and presents an orderly account of the facts thus brought under observation,

neither explaining their origin historically nor relating them to similar phenomena in other languages, but setting them down merely as the details which make the life of the language. A descriptive grammar may be made for any period, or for any person. One might write, for example, an Elizabethan grammar, or a grammar of Shakspere or Chaucer. Or of course one might write a descriptive grammar of present English, which is indeed the kind of grammar which most persons have in mind when they hear or use the word.

These classifications of grammatical studies as comparative, historical, and descriptive correspond to the body of scholarly and scientific information which has gradually accumulated in the knowledge of the subject, but there exists besides a pedagogical use of the term grammar, some of the significances of which may be taken into account. English grammar has long been taught and still is being taught in schools, for the most part as a subject in the elementary curriculum. By the time a student reaches high school and college, he is ordinarily supposed to have enough grammar to get along with for the rest of his days. Now of the three scholarly aspects of the study of grammar, the one that stands nearest to the study as a school subject is obviously descriptive grammar. Yet the term "descriptive grammar" applied to the subject as taught in the schools is not in itself clearly and comprehensively self-defining. The body of possible material in a descriptive grammar of English is so large and may be approached from so many different directions that the subject in practice easily takes on different forms. If one looks back over the past hundred years or more, during which grammar has been an important branch of instruc-

tion in the schools of America and England, one observes both that the subject has been pursued with varying degrees of enthusiasm and also from different points of view. The enthusiasm, however, seems to have borne no definite relation to the wisdom and profitableness of the methods employed, for the periods of greatest general interest in the study of grammar in the past have been just those when the subject was least intelligently apprehended. This accounts for the fact that these periods of enthusiasm were followed by a decline of interest in elementary grammatical studies, from which indeed the present generation is just emerging into a saner appreciation of the meaning and the importance of the subject as a part of elementary education.

The striking characteristic of the older attitude towards grammar is that the subject was not conceived as having any direct connection with the student's powers of speech and expression, but as a method for reducing to exact statement the activities of the language, itself regarded as having a fixed and absolute quality which made possible such a reduction of it to exact statement. Grammar in short was looked upon as a body of knowledge not unlike mathematics and reducible to fixed rule as definitely as mathematics. In this way, the grammarians attempted to give a scientific description of the language. This was above all the day of the grammatical rule. The study of grammar consisted in finding a rule for every word and every construction in the language and in fitting the words to the rules. The exercise of giving the rules for any particular word was known as parsing. Since the language was supposedly made up of parts each of which had as definite a value as a figure in a mathematical computation,

obviously the rules for the use of these elemental parts of the language could not lack in precision. And if the language and the rule were difficult to bring into harmony, it cannot be denied that the old-fashioned grammarian not infrequently yielded to the temptation to accommodate the language to the rule. Above all, the sanctity of the rule must be regarded, for by the rule language was known to be good and correct. Thus it came about that grammarians developed what they called their "systems." The phenomena of speech to be covered by the rules were extraordinarily numerous, varied, and at times intractable — hence the necessity for a system rigid enough to contain so fluid a content. So far as the student himself was concerned, personal judgment and observation of the mental activities underlying speech were rarely or never necessary. All this trouble was saved for the student by the system. The student's business was that merely of applying the rules, not of questioning them, for what was the use of having a system if one was not willing to live by it? And undoubtedly the system saved a great deal of trouble, for after a pupil had found a rule and applied it, his responsibility ceased, no matter what violence he had done to the language in the process.

Parsing as a method of grammatical study was later supplemented by analysis, and again many different and often extremely elaborate systems of analysis were invented by the teachers of grammar. These systems of analysis, based upon an arrangement of lines vertical, horizontal, and diagonal, were intended to serve as kinds of visual geometrical representations of the structural relationships and dependencies of the parts of language. Here again the desire to reduce language to a mathemati-

cally precise description revealed itself. In the practical application of analysis as a disciplinary exercise, the mistakes of the students arose not so much from misapprehension of the meaning of the language analyzed as from misapplication of the mechanical system devised by the grammarians. An adequate system supposedly provided an inalterably proper place for every possible word or construction, and the task of the student was accordingly to make every word or construction fit into its proper niche.

The advocates of parsing and analysis as grammatical studies justified their methods on the ground that they provided a useful mental discipline which "strengthened the mind," and of course that by their methods they were teaching English *as a language*. This phrase *as a language*, which occurs again and again in the older statements of the purpose of teaching grammar, implies a distinction between teaching English as a subject which satisfied the practical needs of students for a medium of expression, and teaching it as a statement of the characteristics and constituents of English conceived as an objective linguistic unity. In other words, the stress was placed upon the language, not upon the student. The practical needs of the student were usually supposed to be met by exercises in bad English, especially false syntax, these exercises being devised merely to correct gross blunders in the use of English.

Though this notion of elementary grammar as an organized and analytic statement of the system of the language has not passed completely out of existence, it is now less faithfully held than formerly. The older methods gave rise to what came to be known as *formal grammar*,

a term which, broadly speaking, might apply to any study of grammar, since all such study must be a study of the forms of speech. As applied to the methods of grammatical study formerly current, however, it designated exactly this process of taking the language as a thing in itself and attempting to reduce the structure and the nature of the language to a formal, that is, finally fixed and regular statement. The objection to the teaching of formal grammar which has been voiced so many times in recent years was based upon the conviction that the older method of studying the language as a language was neither practicable nor useful in elementary instruction, that it exhausted itself in elaborate system building and in fine-spun logical subtilizing which bore no relation to the actual interests and needs of the boys and girls who were made its victims. To take its place, a new notion of elementary grammar began to find advocates, a notion which started not from the position of English as a language, but from the student as a human being in his place as one in a complicated set of social circumstances. According to this newer conception of elementary grammar, the subject ceases to be an abstract science, and indeed the term grammar itself is now often given up, being replaced by some such term as merely English, or English language, or language lessons, or composition, or by any other term which indicates that the study is regarded primarily from the point of view of the student in the development of his skill in the art of expression in English. The content and the method of the subject as thus conceived are therefore determined by what the student needs for his own stage of growth and development, and the ultimate aim of this newer conception of

the study of grammar is not to expound a complete system of the language but to enable the student to use the language satisfactorily and expressively. In short we may say that the present tendency in the teaching of grammar as an elementary school subject is to replace the older scientific and abstract conception of the material by one which looks at English as an applied art. What one studies and teaches now in elementary grammar is not the system of the language, but what people do, how they speak and write in the moments of actual use of the language. The study of behaviorism in language has thus replaced the older attempts at rigid systematization.

In this modern development there has certainly been much profit, though perhaps also a little loss. It can be counted only as a gain that children nowadays are saved from wasting precious time over linguistic subtleties and abstractions that mean nothing to them from the point of view of their own choices and actions. Grammar as a form of behaviorism has much more reality and a much more apparent value than as an orderly system of language. The losses resulting from the modern conception of the subject are likely to be felt most keenly by those who are drawn to the occupation of building orderly and organized intellectual systems. The objection is also made that the modern study of English grammar does not prepare students for the understanding of Latin grammar, that they come to Latin, French, or other foreign languages without a foundation knowledge of the general principles of grammatical structure. It is a dubious argument, however, which assumes that the purpose of teaching English grammar is to prepare students to understand the grammar of some other language. It does not

seem that in justice English grammar can be sacrificed on the alien altar of Latin grammar or that of any other language. If a teacher wanted to present the general principles of inflectional grammatical structure, a good case could be made for the position that this could be done better on the basis of Latin than on the basis of English. But whatever the arguments that may be brought forth for or against it, the modern humane conception of elementary grammar as a subject which stands in intimate relations to the daily lives of the children who study it, must have its day, for by the test of practical results, it very easily justifies itself. Perhaps in time a grammatical science of language will be developed which will make it possible to give a satisfactorily truthful statement of the system of the language, intelligible even to the youthful mind. For the present, however, it would seem that the teaching of English grammar is on safer ground when it attempts something less comprehensive and final.

In the older conception the language was regarded as a kind of mosaic, constructed by putting together the separate parts of speech. Each part of speech supposedly had its definite and inalterable character, what was often called its natural power. This inhered in the word as a part of its essential nature in the same way that the characteristics of any object of the natural world inhered in it. Thus a word as a part of speech was always what it was by virtue of its inherent quality, as an apple is always an apple and a potato is always a potato. And as an apple would remain an apple even when it was boiled in the pot in which potatoes were ordinarily boiled, so a particular word always remained its own part of speech no matter

in what position it might chance to be placed. This notion of the fixed value of words regarded as parts of speech obviously made the work of parsing easy, at the same time that it gave to it something of the aspect of an exact science. For if the parts of speech were as definite as natural objects, they could of course be made the basis for an almost mathematically precise description of the language. Thus the *School Grammar* of William H. Wells, published in 1846, drew a definite parallel between words and natural objects. "The *classification* of words may be introduced by referring to the different kinds of trees; to the different kinds of animals; or to any collection of objects that admit of a regular division into distinct classes. Thus when we go into a forest, we find that the number of trees about us is greater than we can estimate. But we soon observe that a certain portion of them have certain resemblances, while they differ essentially from all the rest; . . . by extending our observation we find . . . all trees . . . belong to a few very simple classes. . . . *Oak* trees . . . *Pine* trees . . . Just so it is with the words of our language."[1]

And as pine trees are not all exactly alike, and as there are white pines, yellow pines, long-leaf pines, and other kinds, so also the different kinds of words would have their sub-kinds. Grammars still extensively used today classify adjectives as descriptive, limiting, definitive, qualitative, quantitative, attributive, pronominal, numeral, predicative, and perhaps some may have even further classifications. The definitions of these grammars run something like this: A descriptive adjective is an ad-

[1] II, 12. See Lyman, *English Grammar in American Schools before 1850*, p. 147.

jective that describes the person, place, or thing referred to, but a limiting adjective limits the meaning of the substantive it modifies. That is, a descriptive adjective describes and a limiting adjective limits. But *red* in *a red apple* limits the meaning of *apple*, since it excludes green apples, and yet it is presumably a descriptive adjective. But this is merely another illustration of the absurdities of classification into which the grammarian is led when he begins to subtilize over the varying logical contents of words. That such things should survive would be incredible if it were not for the evidence of text books still in wide use.

Indeed, the very first difficulty that confronts the grammarian of the old school is one that he cannot overcome. He cannot give an adequate definition of the parts of speech by which they may be intelligibly recognized. A botanist might describe an oak tree or a pine tree with scientific exactness, but the parts of speech are far less tractable. The common definition of the noun, for example, is that *A noun is a name.* This is a definition, however, which does not define. In fact both terms of the definition, like the definition of descriptive and limiting adjectives just cited, mean the same thing, for *noun* is derived from Latin *nomen*, which means merely name. All that the definition says, therefore, is that a name is a name. The definition was not helped much when it was extended to read that a noun is the name of a person, place, or thing, or that a noun is the name of an object or an object of thought. From the point of view of logic and of philosophy all such definitions raise many difficult and subtle questions. A noun is the name for an object, but a word which expresses an action, that is a verb,

names the action and by definition would also be a noun. And can the distinction between an object and an object of thought be clearly carried through? A house is presumably an object and happiness is presumably an object of thought. But is not a house also an object of thought when one thinks about it, and is happiness merely an object of thought? Is *swimming* in *Swimming is good exercise* an object or is it an object of thought, or is it still something different?

So also the traditional definition of the verb is that it is a word which expresses an action or a state of being. By this definition *swimming* in the sentence just given might very well be regarded as a verb. And in the sentence *The division of the property was fairly made*, the word *division* certainly names an action and yet it is no verb. The truth is that the definition of words from the point of their content in meaning is work for the technical logician and philosopher, a work that can be done only by means of the most elaborate analysis and qualification. In reality the student, according to the older methods of instruction, did not identify the parts of speech by definition, as a botanist might identify a pine or an oak tree, but by the much simpler process of recognition. The definition of the noun, for example, was illustrated by a number of examples, and having seen a number of nouns, the student was enabled to group other nouns with these, often correctly and often in spite of the definition. In the same way one might learn to recognize pine and oak trees. Having seen one pine tree, one groups other pine trees with it merely from the sense of general similarity. This may be a very satisfactory way of teaching what a noun is or what any parts of speech are, and especially

for the immature mind, recognition is likely to be a quicker and less confusing way of grouping similar things than definition. This, however, is a question of pedagogical method, and it does not really affect the matter at present under consideration, which is how an organic structure in language is to be defined and how, as thus defined, it is to be systematically described. But certainly the older grammars marched under false colors. They pretended to give genuinely precise and scientific definitions of words as structural elements of speech, though in reality they did nothing of the sort. They contained the appearance of a scientific system, but their system was not derived from observation of the actual processes of speech.

Perhaps the extremest example of the inadequacy of the traditional logical definitions of grammar is to be found in the attempts to define the sentence. The stock definition is that a sentence is a word or group of words expressing a complete thought. But the phrase *complete thought* is exceedingly vague. The speaker or writer who tries to get complete thoughts into his sentences is pretty sure soon to find himself in trouble. He will produce long, involved sentences which nobody will have the patience to try to understand. A great part of the art of expression consists in breaking up complete thoughts into fragmentary thoughts which may be separately assimilated. The truth is of course that the unity of a sentence does not require completeness of thought but merely completeness of structural form. Even completeness of structural form, however, is not an absolute requirement in the sentence, for perfectly satisfactory sentences are often made which do not contain a complete structural form. The most that can be said is that the complete sentence

is the most common type of sentence, especially in literary English, and that it may be taken as the norm. Here again it is much easier to learn what a sentence is by recognition than by definition. A definition that would satisfy the demands of a psychologist or logician would be so elaborate that it would be of no use to the practical grammarian. It seems wiser for the grammarian not to attempt any scientific definition of the sentence, but to rest content with some approximate description, such as the statement, for example, that sentences are the separate structural units into which thought is broken as it proceeds step by step in a sequence of expression.

The chief problem of grammar as an elementary subject today is to find some method by which the subject can be reduced to manageable order, and then, after the subject has thus been clearly and narrowly defined, there is the further necessity of sticking to the definition. How can elementary English grammar be defined from some kind of structural point of view so as to present an organized and manageable content? To begin with, a distinction must be made between logic and structure. The difference between *virtue* and *house*, both of which are nouns but not exactly nouns with the same kind of content, can be brought out only by a method of logical analysis. One is called an abstract and the other a concrete noun in English grammars, and sometimes the grammars discuss at great length the nature of the difference between these two kinds of nouns. Manifestly such logical deliberations might become not only very extensive but also very subtle. They have been a fruitful source of disaster to the grammarian, leading him often so far away from his proper subject that both he and his readers become lost

in wandering. These logical distinctions could be regarded as parts of the structure of English grammar only if English grammar were thought of as some kind of all-comprehending unity, a kind of linguistic cosmos with an organic nature of its own. From such a point of view, anything that entered into English would naturally be a part of this structure of the whole. But it is just this metaphysical notion of English as a universal and single organism that must be rejected. If structure is to mean anything manageable as applied to the elements of English speech, it must mean something less vague and mystical. Structure must apply to things that we can see in the process of being put together and taken apart. The word must apply to something that has observable form and organization and that will show us how the language actually constructs, that is, how it manipulates and arranges the movable elements which when made into combinations produce structures. The largest form of this kind of which we have practical control is the English sentence, and the sentence must be the starting place for any intelligible and organized elementary discussion of Modern English.

Nowhere do the difficulties and complications of logical analysis in language appear more clearly than in the traditional treatment of the parts of speech of which we have spoken. Concerning the insufficiency in general of logical analysis as revealing structure in the language, grammarians seem not to have arrived at a clear understanding. Yet it is quite obvious that the logical analysis of parts of speech and the structural analysis of the way in which the forms of expression are put together do not cover the same ground. It is easy to see that many of

the distinctions that may reasonably be made in the definitions of the parts of speech, and that are customarily made in grammar, are of little or no importance in the discussion of the relationships of words in the formation of those structural combinations which give to language its quality of coherence. For example, in the sentences *John was there* and *He was there*, the subjects are of two different parts of speech, but their structural value is exactly the same. In sentences like *Many were there*, *Ten were there*, *All were there*, the question of the part of speech of the subjects raises a number of difficulties, though these questions are of no importance in connection with the question of the structural relationship of *many*, *ten*, and *all* to the words of the rest of the sentence. The discussion of structure would very often be greatly simplified if the consideration of parts of speech were omitted and attention were focused only upon those elements which are essentially of structural significance. In the verb, to cite another illustration, it makes no difference in the structural organization of a group of words whether a verb is present or past, transitive and intransitive, active or passive, optative, subjunctive, desiderative, potential, or what not, in so far as the relation of the subject to the verb is concerned. The matter of transitivity and intransitivity of course may be structurally important with respect to objects, since sentences in which verbs are followed by objects are structurally different from sentences in which they are not. But the important point is that transitivity is not a fixed quality of the verb itself, regarded as a part of speech, for the same verb may be transitive, as in the first clause of *He rode and I walked*, or intransitive, as in *He rode a bicycle*. In other words,

the quality which we call transitivity should be discussed only in connection with structure, and only when it is structurally important, since there only does it have significance or can it be determined.

Nowadays thoughtful teachers have pretty generally recognized that the way of approach to the study of the structure of the English language through the parts of speech is far from satisfactory. Instead of beginning with the parts of speech, grammars therefore now tend more and more to begin with the sentence. And instead of attempting the impossible task of describing the language as a whole, the modern grammarian, especially in the practical limitations of discussion in the classroom, restricts himself to what is essentially nothing more than the structure or organic form of the English sentence. In all this there has been great gain. For after all, the sentence is an organic unit which may be understood and analyzed as such, but the structure of the language as a whole is something too complicated even for the maturest linguistic student to comprehend clearly. The movement in recent years has therefore been in the right direction, though one may question whether it has gone far enough and whether the modern grammarian has held closely enough to his new definition.

But a short chapter in a book like this is not the place in which to outline a system of grammar, even the relatively simple system of an elementary grammar. The matter must be left therefore with the repeated assertion that the most promising way to rehabilitate grammar as a subject of elementary instruction is to approach it and to develop it strictly from the point of view of the structural arrangement of words in phrases, clauses, and

sentences, and that this must be done without confusing the mind of the student by drawing in irrelevant discussions of the logical meanings of words in themselves, or of words regarded as parts of speech with inherent constructive powers and functions. It takes a little courage to throw overboard the useless burden of fine distinctions which the traditional grammars are attempting to carry. But children can be taught to think without torturing them with the difference between concrete and abstract, the classification of different kinds of adjectives, and the rest of the complicated machinery of general grammar. They can be best taught through materials over which they have effective control. And they can be honestly taught only when the instruction to which they are exposed seriously attempts to achieve what it promises to do.

XVII

THE LANGUAGE AND THE PEOPLE

Direct knowledge of the English language through historical records begins about the middle of the seventh century. In certain deeds of gift and similar legal documents made at that time, the bodies of which are written in Latin, occasional words in English are inserted, and these words are among the earliest bits of documentary evidence for the study of the English language. But they are sparse and fragmentary, and only towards the middle of the ninth century do English writings become abundant. After that, manuscripts written in English are available in sufficient number and extent to permit the writing of an unbroken history of the English language.

As a spoken language, however, English existed in England for several centuries before the date of the earliest written records now extant. The story of the coming of the English to England is known chiefly from the account given by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, written in the first half of the eighth century, and from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, begun about a century later. Both are late authorities, but their narrative in its broad outlines is nevertheless quite credible. The story runs that the English came over to Britain from the mainland on the invitation of the inhabitants of Britain, who at that time were the survivers from a Roman occupation of the island which had lasted for nearly four hundred years. During these four hundred

years, Britain was a Roman colony, administered and protected in the Roman military manner. In the year 411, however, the last Roman legion was withdrawn from Britain and brought back to Italy to repel attacks on Rome itself. The Romans and other Romanized inhabitants of Britain were thus left to shift for themselves, and to defend themselves as best they could against their enemies.

Chief among these enemies were certain Celtic dwellers in the mountainous and less accessible regions of Britain who now came down from their retreats to look for pickings in the fertile and rich lowlands of Romanized Britain. These Celtic tribes were the descendants of the peoples whom the Romans, beginning with Caesar, had fought against and conquered when they entered Britain. Now the Celts were eager for their own again. To repel this Celtic peril, the Romanized inhabitants of Britain sent their famous invitation to the Teutons of the Continent to come over and help them. The dramatic moment, according to the story, was the arrival of the two chiefs, Hengist and Horsa, with their bands of followers, in the year 449. Other captains followed, with other hosts, first to fight with the Romanized Britons against the Celts, but soon to fight against both and to claim for themselves lands and authority and homes in the new country. By the middle of the sixth century three tribes of the invaders, the Jutes, the Angles, and the Saxons, had definitely occupied the island, and had taken the upper hand of both the older Celtic and Romanized population. Celtic and Roman Britain thus became Teutonic England. When the Anglo-Saxons settled in England they therefore imposed their rule, their language, and their civilization

upon the remnants of at least two preceding civilizations, the Celtic and the Roman. Back of the Celts, in the prehistoric twilight, the dim figures of the Picts move vaguely, but of their language not a traceable word remains and scarcely any knowledge of their civilization.

Besides what they brought with them from the Continent and what they found when they arrived in Britain, the Anglo-Saxons reflect in their civilization other cultural influences. One of the earliest and most important began with the arrival of Augustine and other Roman missionaries in 596. Schools were at once set up and in an astonishingly short time the learning, the language, and the religion of Rome were established in England, at least among the higher classes of the Anglo-Saxon people. The Anglo-Saxons became apt pupils of the Romans, and Bede and Alcuin and others won a fame as scholars and writers that extended throughout the medieval world. Through the Roman church and through the monasteries and monastic schools, the Latin language became familiar to many Anglo-Saxons and exerted a far-reaching influence upon the active English speech of this period. To the possible but untraceable contributions of the prehistoric Picts, to the certain but meager contributions of the Celts and the early Roman colonists in Britain must next be added the extensive contributions of the Latin of the church to the development of the English language.

The Anglo-Saxon period in the history of the English language is commonly given as extending from the beginnings to the year 1200. From 1200 to 1500 is designated as the Middle English period, and after 1500, the Modern English period. All chronological divisions are more or

less mechanical and artificial, and, especially in languages, historical changes take place slowly but uninterruptedly. These three divisions indicate, however, the several large aspects of the history of the language, although in each many subdivisions might be made. The Anglo-Saxon period was by no means an era of unbroken and happy development of Anglo-Saxon civilization. About the middle of the eighth century, the Anglo-Saxons became themselves the victims of a new Teutonic invasion. At this time bands of piratical Scandinavians, the dreaded Northmen, later in Normandy in France known as the Normans, began to appear on the English coasts. They soon came in increasing numbers, intent now not merely on plunder, but on permanent conquest and settlement. First they occupied the northern regions of England, and then they turned their attention to the south. The chief resistance to them was made by the little kingdom of Wessex, especially by King Alfred, Alfred's son Edward, and his grandson Athelstan. But this opposition was only partially successful. For a time the Anglo-Saxons regained governmental control of the whole island, but the Scandinavians who had settled on the lands they had received remained where they were and became important elements in the population of the country. Towards the end of the tenth century a new wave of Scandinavian migration swept over England, more destructive than any that preceded it. With the accession of Cnut to the English throne in 1013, a ruler who was at the same time king of Denmark became king of England. But the Danish dynasty in England did not last long, for soon both Danish kings and English kings were replaced by a new line when William of Normandy conquered England.

By origin the conquering Normans of Normandy to a very large extent were Northmen of the same blood as those Northmen who had made England their battle ground for several centuries before the Conquest. By the year 1066, however, the Northmen of Normandy had forgotten their Scandinavian origins. They had accepted the French language and had been so completely assimilated by French civilization that they were not distinguishable from Frenchmen. The fate of the Northmen in France illustrates again the fact that language is thicker than blood. The Norman conquest inaugurated consequently a period of French influence upon the English language.

After the Norman conquest the further history of England has nothing to tell of foreign invasion, of new races bringing new languages upon English soil. The influences thereafter that contributed to the molding of the English language must be sought in the more peaceful fields of intellectual, literary, economic, religious, and social development. The direct influence of the Conquest was soon re-enforced by the influence of French literature, of French learning, and in general of French social customs upon the English. This influence was at its height about the middle of the fourteenth century, and as a result of it, many French words and forms of expression were brought over into the English language. It is scarcely too much to say that English at this time was made over on a French model. It became a very different kind of language in style and manner of expression from the language of the Anglo-Saxon period. These French modifications of English resulted less from the political conquest of the country by the Normans than from English admiration

for the French language of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as the language in which a learned, a polished, and an amusing literature was written. The English at this time had practically no literary or learned culture of their own. The literature of the Anglo-Saxon period was forgotten and no longer intelligible to Englishmen of the thirteenth century on account of the many changes which had taken place in the language. Quite naturally, therefore, the English became enthusiastic admirers and copyists of the finer literary civilization which then flourished in France. The French romances, corresponding somewhat to fiction in our day, were at the height of their popularity throughout Europe, and many new forms of language as well as other forms of polite custom entered England by way of these fashionable tales of knights and ladies.

The next great wave of influence affecting the English language was also literary in character. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the most admired civilization in England was the French. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was the culture and the literature of the Greeks and Romans. The general awakening of interest in classical scholarship and literature known as the Renascence produced far-reaching effects upon the English language. Hundreds of new words were brought into English directly from Greek and Latin, especially from Latin. New endeavors, new models supplied by the classics resulted in the production by English writers of types of literary expression hitherto unknown to the English language. If English was Gallicized in the time of Chaucer and his predecessors, now in the age of the Renascence the language was as effectually Latinized.

The consequence of these two great conversions of English under the influence of French in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and of Latin in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was to change English from a uni-lingual to a bi-lingual language, from a language with a homogeneous to one with a heterogeneous origin. Throughout the whole of the Anglo-Saxon period, that is, to about the year 1200, the language remained a language in which the elements were almost exclusively derived from one source. This source was of course the common proto-Germanic parent speech from which all the Germanic languages received their foundation stock of language material. The English of the Anglo-Saxon period, in grammar, vocabulary, and style of expression was a pure, uni-lingual Germanic language. Certain additions to this stock were made through contact with the Latin of the Roman church in England, but these additions were too few to affect the general character of the whole. A little later the Scandinavian adventurers made further contributions to the English of Anglo-Saxon England, but again the contributions were relatively not numerous, and they were, moreover, so nearly like the language of England, the Scandinavians and the Anglo-Saxons being cousins, as one may say, that in many instances they were assimilated into English without leaving any trace of strangeness or newness behind them. All ideas that were expressed in the Anglo-Saxon language were expressed therefore in a language the elements of which were exclusively and anciently Germanic.

After the period of French and Latin influence, however, all this was changed. Attention has already been called to the fact that both the French and the Latin influence were

prevailingly literary and learned in character. They operated through books, or through the social intercourse of the upper classes of society, and their results were therefore quite different from general popular changes such as might take place when one whole people by conquest or by migration comes into contact with another people. The English language thus acquired new manners of expression, a kind of learned or polite language, appropriate to some uses but not to others, and indeed not clearly intelligible to any persons except those who by special training had become familiar with the language of books. English thus became bi-lingual, a language with the simple speech of everyday existence, learned by hearing it and speaking it in the common experiences of daily life, but a language also with a more formal, ornate, learned speech, to be acquired only through study and from books. Thus it has come about that a great many of the simple words of English today can be paired off with elaborate words, and as a speaker or writer of English today prefers one or the other of the words in the following parallel columns, so he will place himself on the one or the other of the two levels of our bi-lingual speech:

think	conjecture
say	remark, observe
tell	recount
house	residence, mansion, domicile
buy	purchase
enough	adequate, sufficient
heavy	ponderous
wish, want	desire
go to bed	retire
sail around	circumnavigate
cook a meal	prepare a repast

The native and simple elements of English have naturally remained the same within the modern periods of the language, but the learned side of the language has been extended. This extension has come about through the spread of education, through scientific inventions and interest in scientific discovery and thought, through commerce, through a much greater interest in the theoretical aspects of human living, resulting in elaborate discussion of them, than was characteristic of the earlier generations of the English people. Literature also has become a more significant part of the daily life of the English people, not merely since the invention of printing, but especially since the invention of cheap printing and of cheap distribution. Newspapers, books, magazines, letters, these are all a necessary part of every man's existence. The result of these various developments of the Modern English world has been to emphasize and expand the learned side of the language, to make it seem indeed in some respects more important than the simple native base to which it is an addition.

One of the most striking developments in the English language within the modern period has been its geographical extension. By the time this expansion began, however, the language had already passed out of experimental stages and was in essentials the language as we know it today. As it has expanded, English has drawn many new elements to itself, but its character has not been determined by the fact that it has spread from a little island kingdom to a world-wide empire. Of course the first step in this outward movement was taken when the various local dialects of England definitely receded to their position as local dialects, and the speech of London and the vicinity

of London took the lead as a national or approved standard. With the union of England and Scotland in 1603, the English of standard English speech became at least the official language of Scotland, and though English has not caused the extinction of Scottish, it has placed Scottish in the same class with other local and provincial dialects.

In Ireland the situation was somewhat different. The speech commonly known as Scottish is in effect nothing more than the modern representative of the northern dialect of Anglo-Saxon. It is therefore merely a variant form of English. The native speech of Ireland, however, was not English but Celtic. English was extensively introduced into Ireland by the actual transportation of English speaking people from England to the neighboring island. These people settled in particular regions which thus became prevailingly English. The spread of southern English in Scotland was effected not through migration but through educational, literary, and social channels. Because of the manner of introduction of English into Ireland, the fate of Celtic in Ireland has varied a good deal according to locality. In general, however, it may be said that whenever the two languages, English and Celtic, came into rivalry, in the larger cities, in the written literature of the country, in the social intercourse of the official and the educated classes, English has always won over Celtic. Only in outlying and undeveloped communities has Celtic survived, and we may say of Ireland as of Scotland, that the standard language is substantially the same as the standard language of England.

The story of the transplanting of English to the New World is a story too familiar to call for retelling. The

only dangerous rivals English ever had in North America were French and Dutch. The extinction of the Dutch colony in 1664 and the fall of Quebec in 1759 were the decisive moments which spoke for the final triumph of English. Governmental control is almost a necessity on the part of a people whose language is to become a general idiom. And when governmental control is backed, as it was in America, by a popular church, a popular educational system, and an active commercial life, the combination is irresistible.

The English which was brought to America by the pioneer settlers in the first quarter of the seventeenth century and by later immigrants was the established English of England, a language with a long tradition of change back of it, but at that time already settled on a firm foundation of respect for the masters of literature who had employed the language, and for the elements of English society that had accepted the language as an approved social custom. In the three hundred years that have passed since the settlement, the situation has remained unchanged. The English of America is still the English of England, the English of Scotland and of Ireland, by no means without special characteristics of its own, but still so recognizably the same as the parent speech that no other name than English can name it.

The number of English speaking people in the world today is greater than the number of those speaking any other language of Europe, probably greater than those who speak any of the languages of the world if one considers not merely numbers but also the degree of homogeneity which exists in the English speaking world. The population of China is given as four hundred million

people, but the language of this vast population is far from uniform. The speech of certain regions of China is unintelligible to natives of other regions. But the English of Australia and of Idaho, of any part of the English speaking world would not only be intelligible in any other part, but would be immediately utilizable as a satisfactory medium for all business, and for most social and literary expression. So also Russia with her one hundred and thirty-six millions of people possesses not one but a number of different languages. If one counted all the inhabitants of countries governed by English speaking peoples as English, the number would be much greater than the number of any other people in the world. The British Empire alone numbers 442,000,000 souls. When we consider, however, that 319,000,000 of these represent the population of India, we realize that important deductions must be made from this total of population in estimating the number of those who speak English.

The truth is that the bare evidence of numbers may easily be taken to be more significant than it is. The number of English speaking people today is about equal to the total of all those who speak German, French, or Italian. Does this mean, however, that English is on the way to supplant German, French, or Italian? But no sensible person supposes this and perhaps no sensible person would desire it. The time may come when a universal brotherhood of man may demand a single language for all the world. But the time is not yet in sight, in fact is so far in the future that when it does come, English, French, German, Italian, and all the other languages of our modern world will be known in all likelihood

only to the delver in philological antiquities. In the meantime national languages will continue to flourish. Within their own bounds, the English peoples will doubtless change and will increase in numbers. But so far as present indications justify inferences, one must say that they will continue to develop as they have been doing for the past three hundred years, and that their language will be as it has been, the peculiar and honorable possession of but one among the independent nations of the earth.

XVIII

STRUCTURAL CHANGES

The changes which have taken place in the English language in the course of its history are most strikingly and obviously manifested in the formal structure of the language. English is now and always has been an inflectional language. It shares this characteristic of formal structure with all the other languages of the Indo-European family. As in Greek and Latin, as in French and German, the syntactical relations of words in the English sentence are indicated by inflectional endings. The language is constructed by means of parts of speech, each having its distinctive form, and each part of speech having specialized forms for specialized uses. The verbs have tense, person, number, voice, and mood. The nouns and pronouns have gender, number, and case. The adjectives — but the adjectives in English today have nothing, neither gender, number, nor case. And the nouns do not really have gender and case in the sense that these grammatical characteristics are indicated by inflections. Nor do the parts of speech have distinctive forms, for *stone* is a noun in *hard as stone*, an adjective in *a stone house*, an adverb in *stone dead*, and a verb in *to stone a cat*.

The truth is that when we speak of English today as an inflectional language, we cannot mean that the language has as many inflections as it once had, or that it has as many inflections as any of the other members of its family, or even that it has as many as it could readily use. English

has many less inflections than Greek or Latin, less than French or German. It is one of the least inflected of all the Indo-European languages. Historically and by origin English belongs to the type of inflectional languages, and in its earliest stage as represented in Anglo-Saxon, it is much more inflectional than in Modern English, but changes have taken place during the past thousand years which have been so extensive that they have very considerably altered the structural character of the language.

These changes have been progressive and gradual, and changes similar to those which have taken place within the period of the historical records of English may be inferred for still earlier times, when English was in the process of differentiating itself as a special language among its general Germanic and Indo-European sister and cousin languages. In general the effect of all these changes has been to reduce the synthetic structural devices of the language and to increase the analytic. Anglo-Saxon is more synthetic than Modern English. But Latin, which may be taken as more nearly representing the parent Indo-European speech, on the other hand is more synthetic than Anglo-Saxon.

What are synthesis and analysis in language? Synthesis in language is a term used to indicate that the several words in the expression of a thought are provided with distinctive marks, with inflections, as signs of the relationships of the words to each other in the formal structure which the expression of the thought takes. These marks of relationship are the basis of the rules of concord or agreement. In a language like Latin, an adjective agrees with its noun in gender, number, and case. In this respect, therefore, Latin is highly synthetic. But

in Modern English the adjective varies not at all to indicate gender, number, or case. As the adjective in Modern English bears no formal mark of agreement, its syntax is analytic. It is a completely independent word unit, and any adjective in English may be shifted from one noun to another noun without any change whatever in the form of the adjective. The sentence in a synthetic language has an interlocking structure, each word linked to some other word in such a way that the sentence is jointed and articulated as a whole. It moves therefore and works all together. The analytic sentence is built on an independent unit system, the grammatical connection of the separate parts being inferred from the order of their arrangement and from the logical necessity of the ideas conveyed by them.

This change in English from a predominatingly synthetic to an increasingly analytic structure has profoundly affected the whole character of the language. In Modern English the part of speech of a particular word can no longer be discovered from its form. As has just been pointed out, the word *stone* may be a noun or a verb, an adjective or an adverb. The existing inflections of Modern English are on the whole rare and exceptional survivals. The language has not indeed gone the full length of development in the direction of analysis. A completely analytic language would be one in which no marks of relationship or connection between words existed at all. Chinese may be cited as a language which closely approximates this completely analytic structure. A completely synthetic language would be one in which each of the words in a group of words expressing a thought bore upon it a distinctive mark, or distinctive marks,

indicating its connection, logically and grammatically, with other words in the group. But probably no language has ever realized the ideal of a completely synthetic structure. The burden of such a complicated machinery would be unbearable. Anglo-Saxon is more synthetic than Modern English, and Latin is more synthetic than Anglo-Saxon, Greek than Latin, and Sanscrit than Greek. And it is safe to assume that the Indo-European parent speech possessed as elaborate an inflectional system, and was therefore as highly synthetic as any of the branches of the Indo-European family of languages. The probabilities are indeed that if the history of the Indo-European parent speech were traceable from the beginning, the further back toward primitive conditions one passed, the more complicated structurally one would find the language. Elaborateness of structural form is not on the whole characteristic of the language of late and highly developed peoples, but of primitive and rudimentary civilizations. To draw from this statement the inference, however, that analytic structure in language is a mark of high civilization and synthetic structure a mark of low civilization would be going entirely too far. Greek is highly synthetic as compared with English, but as a vehicle of expression, Greek could scarcely be called rudimentary as compared with English. As civilization develops, a development away from synthesis towards analysis is not inherent in it. The Indo-European languages have not been working out an inner destiny towards greater and ever greater simplicity of inflectional form, the ideal being approximately realized in English. On the contrary, if the several branches of the Indo-European family show different degrees of inflectional richness and complexity,

as they do, in each instance a particular set of circumstances must be sought to account for a particular state of affairs in a language. The problem, therefore, in the present discussion, is to find just the circumstances which have made possible the analytic structure now established in Modern English, as contrasted with the other more highly inflected Indo-European languages, such as Greek and Latin, and with the Indo-European parent speech, and of course with the earlier stages of English itself as represented in Anglo-Saxon.

One important factor in this historical development of English is certainly to be found in the special circumstances which attended the several migratory movements of the peoples who spoke the language which in its later stages was to be known as English. Dilapidation in the language must have been hastened by several successive breakings in the continuity of tradition. If the Indo-European parent speech had remained in its original locality, passed on from father to son without disturbance from the outside, the probabilities are that it would have continued to the present day with only slight modifications. For nothing is more tenacious and persistent than social customs when they are not interfered with. But this simple history has not been the fate of the parent speech or of any of the branches of the Indo-European family of languages. At some time in remote history, perhaps four or five centuries before the Christian era, the particular social group which was to speak the general Germanic language detached itself from the older group which spoke a language closer to the Indo-European parent speech. How this separation took place is unknown, but most probably it came as the result of some

kind of folk migration. When people are moving about, when families are divided, when old customs are brought into contact with new, these are just the times when old traditions are lost and new ones acquired. If one is permitted to guess, then, concerning conditions which are not visible in the clear light of history, one would surmise that many of the inflectional elements in the original parent speech were dropped by the wayside as the parent speech passed to the peoples who were the ancestors of the tribes or nations who were to speak the languages in the general Germanic group of languages.

A second interruption in the continuity of tradition brings us a little closer to historical times. When the Angles, the Jutes, and the Saxons transferred themselves from the Continent to England, a situation arose which was extremely favorable to linguistic change and loss. Now the evidence of comparative Germanic grammar shows that the general Germanic speech from which the several Germanic languages were derived was more highly inflectional and therefore more synthetic than the oldest forms of Anglo-Saxon. When were these general Germanic inflections lost out of the language which was to become Anglo-Saxon? Many of them may have been lost when the general Germanic language spread from its original central seat, wherever that may have been, to outlying areas, as for example to that occupied by the progenitors of the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. Many also may have been lost in the several centuries of migration and readjustment which followed the first departures of the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons from north Germany for Britain. These are matters of inference, however, since the direct records of the language of the Germanic in-

vaders of Britain do not begin until two centuries after their earliest arrival in their new home. The fact of the loss, however, cannot be doubted, for the Anglo-Saxon records reveal a language noticeably poorer in inflections than Gothic, which probably stands closer to the parent general Germanic speech than any other historical Germanic language.

Within the Anglo-Saxon period, that is from the beginnings to about 1200, the structural character of the language, judging from the records that have been preserved, was remarkably well maintained. This was on the whole a period of homogeneous, and during the first half of the period, of uninterrupted, cultural development. After the invading Anglo-Saxon tribes had settled down in England, they led peaceful and well-ordered lives. The conventions of a regulated and dignified society are everywhere visible in those monuments of Anglo-Saxon literature that have come down to us. And that the forms of the language should maintain themselves in a society like this is what one would expect. Towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, however, another break in the continuity of tradition occurred. The break at this time was not caused by a new migration of the English people but by a general collapse of the Anglo-Saxon civilization. Various causes contributed to bring about this result, the conquests of the Danes and Northmen, the weakness of English rulers at crucial moments, perhaps a certain gentle ineffectiveness in the character of the Anglo-Saxon people. But whatever the causes, the results were apparent enough. At the end of the tenth and in the eleventh century, the older courtly and dignified tradition of Anglo-Saxon civilization had dis-

appeared. Poetry was no longer written. The schools had fallen into decay. The political life of the country was feeble and corrupt. Social standards were obscured and forgotten. The situation was somewhat as it would be if in our day schools should disappear, law and order vanish, and the whole body of society remit the rules and restraints which now govern it. If that should happen the forms of language which are now repressed as ungrammatical and incorrect would feel no such repression. The older formal traditions would not be strong enough to oppose the newly released popular habits. If that should happen, then *done* might very well be the general form for the past tense of *do*, *seen* the general form for the past tense of *see*, *you was* might replace *you were*, *foots* become the plural of *foot*, and dozens of new general customs like these might establish themselves in the language. But something like this actually did happen to English in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The checks and restraints of the older traditional uses of the language were removed. The natural analogies and simplifications of an unconventional speech increased and extended themselves freely. And out of all this confusion and relaxation of linguistic social custom came a new English language, a language shorn of very many of the inflectional characteristics that had maintained themselves so firmly for five hundred years in the cultivated English speech of England. The older language was forgotten, as completely lost, so far as its practical use was concerned, as if it had never been. After the language had undergone its bath of popular regeneration, the only English language that existed was this popular language. And as English civilization again took on the

dignity of an orderly form and structure in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it was this popular language that was made to serve as the national medium of expression. As the life of England became more dignified, so this speech became more dignified, became at length the speech of literature and cultivated society, and received its classic form in the writings of Chaucer and his contemporaries.

In describing the structural development of English, three chronological divisions are customarily made. The first, corresponding to the Anglo-Saxon period, from the beginnings to about 1200, is commonly called the period of full inflections. The second, corresponding to the Middle English period, from 1200 to about 1500, is called the period of leveled inflections, and the Modern English period, from about 1500, is called the period of lost inflections. The term "full inflections" as applied to the Anglo-Saxon period means that the inflections of the language at that time were relatively both more numerous than at later times and were also pronounced with a fuller and clearer quality of sound than that with which similar syllables would be pronounced in later stages of the language. In present English the tendency is to pronounce final unstressed syllables very obscurely and weakly, but in Anglo-Saxon the final unstressed inflectional syllables, since they were important grammatically, must have been pronounced with what may be called the proper values of the vowels and consonants in them. The term "full" as applied to the Anglo-Saxon period of inflection does not mean that the language then had as many inflections as it could have, that its inflectional system was absolutely full. We have, in fact,

pointed out that the Anglo-Saxon inflectional system had already suffered considerable losses as contrasted with the parent general Germanic language or the grandparent Indo-European language. In comparison with later stages of English, however, the Anglo-Saxon inflectional system may be characterized as full, in both of the respects which have just been described. In the same way the term "lost inflections" as applied to the modern period of the English language must be understood only relatively. Modern English has not lost all of its inflections, but in comparison with the earlier periods, it may fitly be designated as a period of lost inflections. The term "leveled inflections" for the Middle English period indicates that the full inflections of the Anglo-Saxon period were all leveled under one form, the distinctive mark of which is the vowel *e*, representing all that remains in Middle English of the various vowels which appear with full phonetic value in the inflections of Anglo-Saxon.

The explanation of the gradual simplification of the English inflectional system here presented relates the changes to specific causes in the social life of the English people. It does not assume that the English language was working out its own destiny, that with each successive loss of inflectional elements it was advancing nearer and nearer to the ideal of a perfect analytic language. The most striking changes were those that were made in the period of transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, and an explanation has been given, at least for the acceptance of these changes, in the general upheaval in the social life of the Anglo-Saxon people at that time. What were the circumstances which made possible the acceptance of the changes in the transition from Middle Eng-

lish to Modern English, the changes by which all the final *e*'s of Chaucer's Middle English disappeared from the language? This change took place, roughly speaking, in the fifteenth century. But the fifteenth century was not notably a period of general social dislocation and turmoil in England. It was not a period of migration or of extensive foreign additions to the population. The higher cultural life, educational, religious, and political, was maintained with vigor throughout the century. In one important respect, however, the fifteenth century was a period in which the continuity of conservative tradition in language was interrupted. It was a period in which local and provincial customs tended to be replaced by national and standard customs. The literature of the Middle English and of the Anglo-Saxon period was written in a variety of dialects, but the literature of the Modern English period is all written in one dialect, the dialect of standard English. This dialect of standard English took form in the fifteenth century, under the pressure of new economic and social adjustments, and as a standard of this kind could be made only by the elimination of minor local variations or departures from the standard, the acquisition of it necessarily called for the formation of a great many new speech habits by a great many English speaking people. The immediate reason why the final *e* of the leveled inflections of Middle English should be lost in the formation of the new standard Modern English probably is to be found in the slight grammatical value of this final *e*. The final *e* of Middle English grammar stood for so many things that in the end it came to stand for nothing. Only an expert grammarian by the exercise of ingenuity can find system and signi-

ficance in the final *e* of Middle English. The English of daily use, however, is never that of expert grammarians, and Middle English final *e* disappeared because, in the general apprehension, it had no meaning clear enough to sustain it.

Since the end of the Middle English period, no great changes have taken place in the inflectional history of the English language. The inflections of English today are substantially the same as the inflections of the year 1500. The old singulars of the second personal pronoun, *thou*, *thine*, and *thee*, and the old second and third singular present of the verb in *-est*, *-eth* have disappeared, except in archaic and special uses, and a few tense forms in the verb have varied, *holp* becoming *helped*, *writ* becoming *wrote* and so with others. But structural simplification in the language has not been carried appreciably further during the Modern English period. The opportunity has been there, for the language might as readily dispense with some of the inflectional forms it has retained as with those it has lost. But as the language became standardized in the fifteenth century, it fixed upon those forms which were then current in use, with little regard to the question whether the process of simplification had been carried as far as it might be or not. For the past four hundred years, the standard of the language with respect to structural form has remained unaltered. It has lost little and it has added practically nothing. And so far as the future may be seen from this present, no reason appears which leads one to think that the language will not continue as it has been for an indefinite time to come.

XIX

THE CAUSES OF STRUCTURAL CHANGE

The discussion in the preceding chapter dealt primarily with the circumstances which permitted modifications of the traditional structural forms of English to become generalized and established in the customary practice of the language. But manifestly these favoring circumstances were not themselves the originating motive forces in the changes. Many new uses have become established as common practices of the language because the language at various times has passed through stages of popular disturbance when older customs were less tenaciously held than they had been. But though the general mental attitudes of these periods of social upheaval permitted the dissemination and the ready acceptance of innovations, they could not have been in themselves the direct causes of change. For it cannot be supposed that the popular mind is always in a state of unrest, always adjusting anew its cultural inheritance and always eager to reject older complex forms and reduce them to a new simplicity. It must be remembered that the primitive Indo-European speech was itself a popular speech, and that for many generations it maintained a much more highly elaborated structural form than that which appears in the relatively late manifestations of English within historical periods. All linguistic changes cannot be explained in lump under the heads of general sociological conditions, nor can they, on the other hand, be explained as the result of definite

reforming intentions and purposes. The specific causes of language changes lie between. No one determined that the traditional structural system of the English language should be simplified and then directed the work of simplification. While the changes were going on, no one realized how they would turn out or what the general drift of them was, whether for the better or the worse. Undoubtedly in stray instances, individuals rebelled against or supported particular modifications, but a general program with determining powers back of it was in the mind of no man. The causes of changes in language are to be found always in specific linguistic activities, yet not often in intentional purpose, and each set of details is to be explained only by examining the details themselves in the circumstances in which they appeared in the active use of the language for the practical applications for which the language exists. The general discussion of the favoring conditions which permitted new forms to become established must therefore be supplemented by a consideration of those immediate linguistic moments which brought the new forms into being.

In the examination of those linguistic processes which have given to the English language its characteristic structural forms, one might of course go back very far and attempt to explain first of all how the language in its remote beginnings acquired its fundamental inflectional elements. What were the linguistic processes which made the parent Indo-Germanic speech an inflectional language? The attempt to answer this question would carry the investigator back to many troubled matters in the very origin of language. It is, however, an endeavor which properly pertains to the comparative philologist

and the student of general linguistics. No invention of inflectional structural form has taken place within the historical periods of the English language, and the particular field of the student of English is therefore to discover what was done with the traditional supply of inflections passed on to it, not to account for their ultimate origins. This material can best be examined by taking specific groups of structural forms, and by trying to discover, through circumstantial evidence, what seem to have been the determining causes which produced the modifications which took place in them.

One such important group consists of the inflectional forms of the English noun. In Anglo-Saxon, the noun was inflected for gender, for type, for number, and for case. The Anglo-Saxon inflection for gender in the noun is something which has altogether disappeared from Modern English grammar. The Modern English noun has no grammatical gender. Two words like *boy* and *girl*, *duck* and *drake*, which name persons or animals of different sex, have differing logical content, but this difference is not a difference of grammatical form. It is a matter of concern to the dictionary maker, not to the grammarian. The whole discussion of gender could be, and should be, omitted from the grammar of the noun in Modern English. The proper use of the pronouns *he*, *she*, and *it* calls for some knowledge of natural gender, that is, of the sex of the persons or animals referred to by the pronouns, but this knowledge is acquired by knowing the meanings of the words of the language, or if it has not been acquired, the proper time to dwell on it is in the discussion of the pronoun, not the noun.

The grammatical characteristics of the noun in Anglo-Saxon from the point of view of gender are not so easily disposed of as the question of gender in the noun in Modern English. In the first place, gender in the Anglo-Saxon noun was a genuinely grammatical, not merely a logical, distinction. It referred specifically to the manners of inflection of nouns. Nouns inflected according to one manner are called masculine nouns, according to other manners, feminine or neuter nouns. These are the three genders of nouns in Anglo-Saxon. All Anglo-Saxon nouns of the masculine gender do not name male creatures or creatures thought of as male. There is no general agreement between the genders of Anglo-Saxon nouns and the sex of the objects named by them. The word *stān*, stone, is a masculine noun, the word *glōf*, glove, is a feminine noun, and *hūs*, house, is a neuter noun. But *wīf*, wife, is also a neuter noun, though it names a female, and *wīf-man*, woman, is a masculine noun, though it has the same meaning as *wīf*. What determines a noun as being masculine, feminine, or neuter in Anglo-Saxon is not its logical content, but the way in which it is inflected. Gender, therefore, as the term is used in Anglo-Saxon grammar and in the grammar of other inflectional languages, has a meaning close to the meaning of the Latin word from which, through the medium of a French form, it is derived. Latin *genera*, plural of *genus*, means classes or kinds, and the *genera* or genders of nouns were originally merely the kinds or classes of nouns. Obviously a language might have more than three classes or kinds of inflection of nouns, and some languages actually have a dozen or more — a dozen or more different genders of the noun.

Though gender in the Indo-European languages has to do primarily with manner of inflection, there seems, nevertheless, to have been from very early times some partial connection between male, female, and sexless objects and the three genders or classes, masculine, feminine, and neuter, of inflection in the noun. A moment ago the statement was made and illustrated that the names of inanimate objects might be masculines or feminines in Anglo-Saxon, and at the same time an example of a word for woman as a neuter noun was given, and another word for woman which was a masculine noun. Now it is common enough for nouns naming inanimate objects in Anglo-Saxon to be masculines or feminines, but the two words *wīf* and *wīfman*, one neuter, the other masculine, are somewhat exceptional. Ordinarily in Anglo-Saxon nouns naming males are inflected according to the masculine type and nouns naming females according to the feminine type. The same is true of Latin. Nouns of the first declension in Latin are feminines, and the noun *nauta*, sailor, is a feminine noun, though it names a male, because it is inflected like other feminines of the first declension. But the ordinary custom of Latin is to inflect nouns naming males according to the masculine type of inflection. In Latin, as in Anglo-Saxon, inanimate objects may be indifferently masculines, feminines, or neuters, according to their manner of inflection. Since the terms masculine, feminine, and neuter correspond so imperfectly to the notion of male, female, and sexless objects, it would seem that better terms, which do not raise the question of sex at all, might be found to designate the genera or genders of highly inflected nouns like those of Latin and Anglo-Saxon. A simple numerical termi-

nology, first, second, and third genders, would occasion less mental confusion than the traditional terms masculine, feminine, and neuter.

The gender of nouns in Anglo-Saxon was syntactically of great importance because adjectives were inflected to agree in gender with the nouns they modified. Among adjectives is to be counted the definite article, the almost universal accompaniment of nouns. Very often when the gender of a noun might be in doubt, because the same noun ending may appear in different genders, as well as in different cases, this uncertainty is removed by the definite article, the forms of which are more distinctive for the different genders and cases.

How did it come about that the Anglo-Saxon distinction of gender in the inflection of the noun was lost in the language? Mainly because already in Anglo-Saxon the marks of the distinction had ceased to have precise defining values. The distinction itself had no significance so far as the meanings of the nouns were concerned. The noun *stān*, stone, in Anglo-Saxon is a masculine noun, the noun *word*, word, is a neuter noun, and *lār*, lore, is a feminine noun, but the difference in gender adds nothing distinguishing to the meanings of the three words. When the distinction of gender was lost, the language lost nothing valuable on the side of significance, for the Anglo-Saxon words *stān*, *word*, and *lār*, and all the other nouns like these, meant the same after they had lost the inflectional characteristics which made it possible to classify them as belonging to different genders as they had before. Class or gender was therefore a purely formal survival in Anglo-Saxon. Yet the fact that inflection for gender carried with it no logical significance in Anglo-Saxon would not

be in itself a sufficient explanation of the disappearance of this manner of inflection. Languages often hold tenaciously and for long times what has ceased to be significant, as Modern English nouns continue to do in a few stray survivals. The making of a plural *feet* instead of *foots*, for example, is such a meaningless survival, that is, meaningless in the sense that as a plural *feet* means nothing more than a plural formed in the usual way by adding *-s* to the singular would mean. But the more immediate cause of the loss of inflection for gender in the Anglo-Saxon noun was the fact that the system of endings whereby the distinctions were indicated was very imperfect and undiscriminating. For example, a masculine, a feminine, or a neuter noun might appear with the ending *-e* in the nominative singular, though a masculine, a feminine, or a neuter noun might also appear without any ending at all in the nominative singular. It would seem that an unsophisticated Anglo-Saxon, that is, one who happened not to have been brought up in the strict traditions of the language, must have experienced a good deal of difficulty in determining when a nominative singular should appear with a final *-e* and when it should not. So also an ending *-u* might appear in a feminine and also a masculine nominative singular, and in a neuter nominative and accusative plural, and the ending *-um* appeared regularly in the dative plural of all nouns. The ending *-an* might appear in the nominative and accusative plural of masculines, feminines, or neuters, as well as in the genitive, dative, and accusative singular of masculines and feminines and in the genitive and dative singular of neuters. The ending *-es* might appear in the genitive singular of both masculines and neuters, and the ending *-a*

might appear in a nominative singular masculine, in the genitive plural of all genders, and in the genitive, dative, and accusative singular of masculines and feminines. The remarkable thing is not that this imperfect system of inflections for gender should disappear, but that the Anglo-Saxons were able to use it at all with regularity. Yet the recorded monuments of Anglo-Saxon literature show that the system was applied with a high degree of regularity, though it remains a matter of doubt whether cultivated and uncultivated, atheling and serf, were equally in command of these traditional linguistic forms. In the days of King Alfred there were in all probability persons who corresponded to the illiterates of our day and who were not altogether sure of themselves when it came to attaching the proper marks for the different genders, numbers, and cases of the noun. But if there were none such in Alfred's day, certainly there must have been many a century or so later, so many that by the sheer weight of numbers their uses became the prevailing uses of the language at the time of transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English.

The gender of Anglo-Saxon nouns was determined by the way in which they were inflected, but all nouns of the same gender were not necessarily inflected in the same way. In other words, the Anglo-Saxon noun is classified not only for gender, but also for general type of inflection. The classification into types runs parallel to the classification according to gender to a certain extent, but some types contain within them nouns of more than one gender. On the side of significance this classification according to type had even less value than the classification according to gender, for the gender of an Anglo-Saxon noun was

important in connection with the gender of the adjective that modified it, but the type of inflection of a noun entailed no syntactical correspondences of any kind. The endings which determined the type of a noun were of course the same ones that indicated gender and case, endings therefore that were no more determining for this purpose than they were for the others. The distinctions of type therefore went the same way as the distinctions of gender, that is, they were lost as the result of the general confusion of the values of all endings. A few of the older variations survived, however, like *ox*, *oxen*, which is now the sole representative of the weak type of noun inflection in Anglo-Saxon, though formerly many nouns were inflected in this same way. In a few instances, as in *child*, *children*, *cow*, *kine*, the weak inflection was even extended to nouns which originally belonged to other types. Nouns like *foot*, *feet*, *tooth*, *teeth*, also belonged to a special type in Anglo-Saxon which has left these few traces in Modern English. For the most part, however, the classification into types of inflection in Anglo-Saxon was made upon the basis of vowel endings, and it was the confusion and ultimately the loss of these vowel endings that in the end reduced practically all English nouns to one type.

A consequence of the relinquishment of the distinctions of gender and of type in the noun was that the inflectional endings became even less weighted with meaning than they had been before, and were therefore maintained less conscientiously in their full phonetic forms. So long as the inflectional endings were useful and necessary to mark differences of gender and of type, they would be cherished by all speakers who made these distinctions in their

speech. But when the distinctions were no longer carefully made, almost inevitably the formal marks by which the distinctions were indicated would be slighted, with the consequence that soon they could not be made. Thus it came about that the several vowels of the endings in Anglo-Saxon were leveled in Middle English under one form, the vowel *-e*, with the value of the final vowel of *Cuba*. This vowel, though it held on more or less throughout the Middle English period as an archaic, and to a great extent, a meaningless survival, ultimately disappeared altogether in the transition from Middle English to Modern English.

The fortunes of the inflectional system of the Anglo-Saxon adjective were bound up with those of the noun. The adjective in Modern English can travel no further along the path of inflectional loss because it has nothing left to lose. Since the days of the Anglo-Saxons, it has lost a great deal. The English adjective began its career with an abundant supply of inflections, but of this original stock not a single fragment remains in Modern English. The only variation of which the Modern English adjective is susceptible is the change which indicates the degrees of comparison. But this is scarcely to be called inflection, being more like the addition of a suffix, as *kind* may be changed to *kindness*, *swift* to *swiftly*. The addition of the suffix indicating the comparative or superlative degree of an adjective changes the logical content of the adjective, but does not alter its grammatical relation to the other words in its context. The degrees of comparison of an adjective are, indeed, as independent as three separate words indicating degrees of a quality, for example, *large*, *medium*, and *small*. This variation of the adjective to

indicate degrees of comparison has persisted because the degrees of comparison are a useful device in the language, but of the more strictly grammatical, that is, syntactical, features of the Anglo-Saxon adjective, none has survived.

The Anglo-Saxon adjective was inflected for type as strong or weak, in which respect it resembled the noun, for the noun likewise had a type distinction of strong and weak, and it had all the cases, numbers, and genders of the noun, with which its inflections agreed by the rules of concord. Whether an adjective was inflected strong or weak depended upon its circumstances. If an adjective in Anglo-Saxon was preceded by a definite article or other demonstrative word, then the adjective was inflected weak, otherwise it was inflected strong. From the practical, common sense point of view no more useless bit of linguistic furniture can be imagined than this distinction in the inflection of the adjective as strong or weak. In its ultimate origins the distinction may have had some expressive significance, but long before Anglo-Saxon times it had already degenerated into nothing more than a meaningless survival. Only an unremitting zeal for the conservation of every scrap of the linguistic tradition could have maintained it in the language, but it was just this zeal which was notably lacking in the England that followed the close of the Anglo-Saxon period.

So far as the distinctions of gender in the adjective are concerned, obviously they would and could be made only if distinctions of gender were also made in the noun. Gender in the adjective meant nothing except as a rule of concord with the noun. But when the noun lost its classifications according to gender, there was nothing left for the adjective to agree with. Here again the important

point in this development is that there was no content in the inflection of the adjective to agree in gender with the noun which was of any importance on the side of significance. The same adjective could be inflected as a masculine, a feminine, or a neuter, according to the gender of the noun it modified, but whatever its inflection, the adjective meant exactly the same thing. In giving up the inflection of the adjective the language therefore gave up nothing except a bit of worn out linguistic machinery. If one had been living at the time the thing was done and if one had been a conservative literary person, no doubt the process would have seemed brutally direct. At the safe distance of a thousand years, however, it is difficult to feel anything except gratitude that the language thus succeeded in relieving itself of a heavy and profitless burden.

As an adjective must be counted the difficult little word known as the definite article. By origin the definite article was partly pronominal and partly adjectival, that is, it was a demonstrative adjective pronoun. In Modern English it is represented by the single form *the*, but in Anglo-Saxon it carried the full inflections of the strong adjective, in all cases and in the three genders and the two numbers. The inflection of the article for gender was of course dependent upon the noun, for the Anglo-Saxon article, like every adjective, agreed with its noun in gender. But the loss of gender in the noun made the distinctions of gender in the article both useless and impossible. All the inflectional variations in the article were therefore reduced to the one form *the*, the noun, the adjective, and the article thus agreeing in not having any gender, whereas before they had been compelled to adapt themselves to each other, whenever they were used in combinations,

according to the demands of a complicated grammatical concord. The elimination of the different gender forms of the article is all the more remarkable because the inflection of the article was not indicated by weak vowel endings which might easily be confused and lost, as in the nouns and adjectives. On the contrary, the article was monosyllabic in almost all of its forms and the forms on the whole were more distinctive for their uses than the forms of the noun. When it is impossible to tell the gender of an Anglo-Saxon noun from its form, because the forms of the nouns are so vaguely distinctive, the article usually supplies precise information. The forms of the article, therefore, might have been easily retained if they had been needed, but distinctions of gender forms in the article were obviously valueless when the nouns ceased altogether to give the clues which indicated the proper forms of the article to be attached to them. Perhaps one might expect that under the circumstances the article would have dropped out of the language altogether. It has indeed survived in such weakened meanings that often it is difficult to define precisely what it adds to the content of the phrases in which it occurs. Nevertheless the feeling for the idiom would be violated if one failed to use the article in its proper places, even though there seemed to be no loss in meaning when the article is omitted. Some similar feeling doubtless entered into the attitude of those Middle English users of the language who were content to reduce all the varied forms of the article to one, but not content to get along, as Latin does, without an article at all.

After gender, the most complicated grammatical situations in the Anglo-Saxon noun are those of case. In the

adjective, and in the article, case is a matter of concord with the noun. The adjective and the article follow their leader, or did follow him, so long as he gave them the proper directions. And when in the end both adjective and article gave up all inflection for case, they did so because the noun no longer demanded the service of them. The starting point for the discussion of case in noun, adjective, and article is therefore the noun.

The Anglo-Saxon noun had four cases, the nominative, or the case of the subject, the genitive, or *of*-case, the dative, or *to*-case, and the accusative, or the case of the object. The specific inflectional forms of the several cases varied with the genders of the nouns. Thus the cases of a masculine noun were not indicated by the same endings as the cases of a feminine or neuter noun. But it was mentioned in an earlier paragraph that the endings determining gender were not always unequivocal in meaning, since the same ending might appear in different genders. The same statement applies to the distinctions of case. The ending *-e*, for example, might appear in any case of any gender in a noun in the singular. All the case endings were not so indefinite in their values, but it can readily be seen that if the particular case form of a noun depended upon the gender of it, and if the distinctions of gender themselves were lost, the result would be a vague realization of the appropriate applications of the case endings, followed by a disinclination to use case endings at all, and this in turn by a general atrophy of them. With the exception of the genitive case, which had a special reason for surviving as the modern possessive, this was indeed what happened.

But the distinctions of case endings had connections in

Anglo-Saxon other than those which depended on the genders of the nouns. The case endings indicated the syntactical relationships of the nouns to other words in the sentence. Case in so far as it reflected the genders of nouns might easily be given up and without any loss, since the genders of nouns themselves were given up. But syntactical position, especially subject and object, were simple necessities of sentence structure which the language could not give up. How then could the Anglo-Saxon noun discard its case endings and still retain the distinction of nominative or subject and accusative or object? But this was something not altogether new in the language, for it had already been done to a considerable extent in Anglo-Saxon. The masculine singular *stān*, stone, has the same form for the nominative and accusative, and the plural *stānas*, stones, is also the same for the two cases. Neuter nouns always had the nominative and accusative alike, and so likewise did many feminine nouns. The simple truth is that case endings were not inescapably necessary to indicate these cases, for if they were, Modern English, which has no case endings in the noun used as subject and object, would be in an embarrassing position. Case in Anglo-Saxon was indicated only partly by endings, but also by the fact that the nominative was the case of a noun standing before a governing word and the accusative, with which the dative was combined, was the case of a noun standing after a governing word. Modern English has no other means of indicating case, for the dependent adjective and article naturally have not retained what the noun itself has relinquished. Modern English grammars therefore very properly do not speak of a nominative and accusa-

tive case, but merely call what was formerly a nominative the subject, and what was formerly an accusative, the object.

Besides the case of the subject and the case of the object, Modern English employs what it calls a possessive case, as in *the king's jewels, the kings' jewels.* This is the only case of the noun in Modern English that has a case ending, the possessive *-s* of *king's* and *kings'* being a direct survival of an Anglo-Saxon genitive *-es.* This Anglo-Saxon genitive *-es* appeared only in the genitive singular of masculine and neuter nouns of certain types. The genitive relation was expressed by other endings in other types and in feminines, especially by the endings *-e, -a,* and *-an.* Genders and types were all eliminated from the noun, however, in the transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English, and following the general principle of employing a single form for a single purpose, which was dwelt upon in the discussion of the drift toward regularity, the several different ways of indicating the genitive case in Anglo-Saxon were replaced by the one which was historically, and from the historical point of view legitimately, proper only in the singular of masculine and neuter nouns. The *-es* ending of genitive singular masculines and neuters then took on the generalized value of a genitive or possessive ending, to be used wherever it was necessary to express this meaning. So it came to pass that nouns by origin feminines made their possessives in *-es,* and that plurals expressed the possessive relation by an ending which previously had been the mark only of a singular possessive. Here again in giving up the half dozen different ways of indicating the possessive or genitive relation, the language gave up nothing significant

on the side of meaning. For the relation remained the same, whether it was indicated in a single or in a variety of ways.

The use of the apostrophe in the modern possessive is a late addition to the resources of the language designed mainly as an assistance to the eye. Thus when one says *The kings jewels belonged to the state*, this might mean either *The king's jewels belonged to the state*, or *The kings' jewels belonged to the state.* To the ear the possessive singular or plural sounds exactly like the plain plural, but the apostrophe serves a useful purpose for those who occupy themselves with the literary aspects of the language in showing that the *-s* of the possessive is different in intention from the *-s* of the plural, and the *-s* of the possessive singular from the *-s* of the possessive plural.

It is easy enough to account for the Modern English *-s* of the possessive case as a direct survival of Anglo-Saxon *-es* of the genitive, but the question still remains why an inflectional ending should have been preserved in this instance and not in any other of the inflectional modifications of which the Anglo-Saxon noun was capable. The answer is that the ending of the genitive case was needed to serve a useful purpose as the endings of the other cases were not. The case of the subject could be indicated by its position before the governing word and the case of the object by its position after the governing word, but possession could not be so clearly indicated merely by position. Since the possessive in a phrase like *the king's jewels* is to all intents an adjective modifier of *jewels*, it might be supposed that the relationship between *king's* and *jewels* could have been indicated in the same way as that in which the connection between an adjective and a noun is

ordinarily indicated, as in *the rich jewels*, merely by placing the adjective before the noun. If this method had been followed, a noun before another noun would be taken as a possessive modifier of the second noun, and the *king jewels* would thus mean what we express by the construction *the king's jewels*. Such a structure would indeed have been practicable, but it could have been employed only with the loss of certain other valuable possibilities in the language. For, after all, the possessive is not merely an adjective like any other adjective, but only an adjective with specialized possessive meanings. If the possessive had no appropriate ending, it would be impossible to distinguish *the man-servant* from *the man's servant*, or to use the possessive in the absolute preposition without any immediately following noun, as *not my hat but that man's*. After all the good reasons one can give for the retention of the older genitive ending are given, however, it is necessary to add that the ending may have persisted for no very definite reason, but merely because it was there. Languages do not always move in simple, orderly, and economical ways their wonders to perform, and though they usually do so, it is also true that they cannot always be held strictly to rational account.

The remaining inflectional variation of the noun is that for number. Inflection for number in Anglo-Saxon differs, however, from inflection for gender and case in that it serves a double purpose. It was partly significant, that is, concerned with the meaning of a word as a word, and partly syntactical, concerned with the more formal relationships of the word to other words with which it was combined. Inflection for gender and case were important only from this second point of view. For whether a noun

was masculine, feminine, or neuter made no difference in the character of its meaning, and the same noun meant the same thing whatever case it was in. But *stān*, meaning one stone, obviously has a value of its own and different from *stānas*, meaning more than one stone, quite independent of the formal manner in which the difference is indicated and of the relationships of the word to other words. But besides this significant value, inflection for singular and plural also had a merely formal importance in Anglo-Saxon in that the manner of indicating singular and plural varied in the several genders and types of noun declension, and in that adjectives or articles modifying nouns agreed with them in inflection for number just as they agreed with their nouns in inflection for gender and case. Manifestly it was not these merely formal variations of the number inflection of the noun that determined its further history. These fell by the wayside for the most part with the other formal variations of the noun for gender and case. But whatever was done with inflections, the distinction of number was too important and too necessary to be given up. It could not be sufficiently indicated by order of words, as case could be, and consequently the language pioneers and iconoclasts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries retained the traditional manner of indicating plural number by means of inflectional endings. But they by no means retained the complete equipment for indicating plurals which the traditions of the language delivered to them. On the contrary, they followed that simple principle of efficiency in language which usually is applied when nothing stands in its way, and which leads the users of the language to employ a single form for a single purpose. In this instance

the form that tended to become generalized as the distinctive mark of the plural was the inflection of the strong masculine of the type of *stān*, stone, *stānas*, stones, the gradual weakening and disappearing of the vowel of the ending ultimately leaving nothing but *s* as the mark of the plural. This ending took the precedence over other Anglo-Saxon ways of indicating the plural probably because it contained this consonantal *s*. The other plural endings were mostly vocalic endings, especially *-u*, *-a*, and *-e*, but these endings were phonetically hard to maintain clearly and distinctly. The ending *s* was the fittest to survive and it therefore took the place of all the older vowel endings. A few exceptional forms have been kept alive, however, without the *s*, as in *ox*, *oxen*, *foot*, *feet*, plurals of this second type because the plural was not indicated by a weak inflectional ending, but by a variation within the accented syllable of the word itself, and plurals of the type *ox*, *oxen* because the *n* ending as a consonant had something of the tenacious quality of the *s* ending. All *n* endings, however, showed a strong tendency to drop off in Middle English, Anglo-Saxon infinitives like *wrītan*, for example, becoming first Middle English *writen*, then *write*, with the final vowel pronounced, and finally Modern English *write*, with no final vowel, and this tendency made the *n* endings of plurals a feeble competitor for supremacy against the *s* endings. With the generalization of *s* as the mark of the plural, this *s* ending took on two generalized values, the general value of plural and of possessive. In thus using the same form for two purposes, it might seem that the language builders were less systematic than they might have been. But though it would have been a gain to have had a separate form for the

possessive and another for the plural, it must be remembered that all these changes were not made systematically and consciously, but in the give and take of everyday practical life. The language builders used what materials they had, being satisfied with what worked, even if they fell short of a perfect system. The ending *s* for the double purpose of possessive and plural was practically possible because the two meanings of plural and possessive are so different that they are not likely to be confused. The ending *s* is a kind of inflectional homonym, a single form with more than a single meaning, like the word *still*, quiet, or an apparatus for distilling; or the word *pile*, which may mean a heap of objects, a piece of timber driven into the ground, the nap of velvet, plush, and other cloths, or a tumor of the rectal veins. Such homonyms in grammar or vocabulary seldom make trouble. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the lack of distinctive forms for possessive and plural is a defect in the language. It thus becomes impossible to tell when one hears the sentence *The horses legs were covered with mud* whether this means *The horse's* or *The horses' legs were covered with mud.* It is true the apostrophe is introduced to make the situation clear to the eye, but one does not speak an apostrophe in the possessives of nouns. To avoid uncertainty, the plural possessive of *horse* would have to be expressed by a phrase, *The legs of the horses*, etc. Another complication arises in making the possessives of nouns like *sheep* and *deer*, which have the same form in the plural as in the singular. These nouns belonged in Anglo-Saxon to a special type which to a certain extent resisted the leveling influence of the type of nouns which made their plurals in *s*. Nouns of the

type of *sheep* and *deer* had no plural ending in Anglo-Saxon, and though many Anglo-Saxon nouns of this type have taken the customary plural *s*, a few have survived unchanged. Now the possessive singular of *sheep* would be regularly *sheep's*, but what would the possessive plural be? The plural of the word being *sheep*, without any *s* ending, the ordinary rule that the plural possessive is indicated by placing the apostrophe after the plural *s* would not be applicable here. Nevertheless, it is the only rule that can be applied, and one would therefore write *The sheep's wool is valuable*, and *The sheeps' wool is valuable*, though this second form looks as though one had in mind a plural subject *sheeps*. These are of course very minor matters when one regards the language as whole, but they have their interest as showing that languages as they develop practically do not provide for all the complications that may arise.

The adjective and the article lost all inflection for number in the same way that they lost the inflection for gender and case. The plural adjective had no *s* ending in Anglo-Saxon but only vowel endings and the ending *-an*. It is conceivable that the ending *-an* might have persisted as a plural adjective ending in later English, or even that the *s* ending of the plural of nouns might have been extended to adjectives. We should then have had in Modern English such syntax as *The blacks dogs are spaniels*. In the same way, and with greater right, a possessive *s* might have persisted in adjectives, for a genitive ending *-es* was present in the inflectional system of the adjective in Anglo-Saxon. If it had, then we might now be saying such things as *the black's dog's tail* and *the blacks' dogs' tails*. Many other things like these might also have

happened, but so far as the adjective is concerned, undoubtedly in the mind of the persons who gave Modern English its present form, the important point with respect to the adjective was that it modified a noun. It mattered little whether the adjective *black* modified a possessive *dog's* or a plural *dogs*, for it would readily be taken for granted that it modified the whole idea expressed by the noun, however that may have been varied.

The pronouns of Modern English differ from nouns and adjectives in possessing a fairly elaborate system of forms, quite as elaborate as that of Anglo-Saxon. The noun is not now varied for case, but the objectives *me*, *her*, *him*, *them*, *whom* of the pronouns are different from the nominatives *I*, *she*, *he*, *they*, *who*. The pronoun of the third person still retains three forms corresponding to the three genders. In short, the whole process of inflectional loss, which affected the noun and the adjective so profoundly, left the pronoun almost untouched. But the reasons for this are not far to seek. Formal distinctions were not felt to be more necessary in the pronoun than in the noun and adjective. In the matter of case, for example, if one form of a noun may serve either as subject or object, according to its position, in the same way one pronoun form might have been generalized. Thus *I*, *she*, *he*, *they*, *who*, might have been used both as subject or object, or *me*, *her*, *him*, *them*, *whom* might have replaced the older nominative forms. Displacements like this are continually being made in popular ungrammatical English, and if they were not held in check by conservative tradition, they would very probably in time result in that same loss of distinction in form for the cases of the pronoun which has already become established in the noun.

But if this tendency is present now, the question naturally occurs, was it not also present in those earlier periods of transition from Anglo-Saxon to Middle English when conservative tradition held the language in check very little, and if so, why did it not result in the same kind of simplification as that which modified the language so extensively in other directions? The main reason why the pronouns have retained their several forms, while the nouns and adjectives have not, is probably to be discovered in the fact that the distinctions of gender, number, and case in the pronouns were contained in stressed syllables, the pronouns being monosyllables, whereas the distinctions of gender in the nouns and adjectives were expressed ordinarily in final unstressed syllables. The whole history of English shows that a final unstressed syllable had little chance of surviving, especially if it was vocalic, and it was the loss of these final vocalic syllables that carried with it the loss of the major part of the inflectional system of the noun and the adjective. As a plural like *feet* resisted the drift towards regularity in the nouns, because it contained within its own body a device of its own for indicating the plural, so also the forms of the pronoun resisted the drift toward regularity which made subject and object alike in the noun because subject and object were not differentiated by vague and feeble endings but by such ponderable differences as that between *I* and *me*, *she* and *her*, *he* and *him*. The pronouns never had any final syllables to lose. They have preserved their identity and they have preserved their variations in form because these variations were inherent and radical parts of the words.

Gender as it is preserved in the pronoun of the third person is a very different thing from gender in the same

pronoun in Anglo-Saxon. In Anglo-Saxon a masculine pronoun of the third person might have a noun naming a male being as its antecedent, but it might also have as antecedent any one of those many nouns which were masculines in Anglo-Saxon only because they were inflected in a certain manner. Thus *stān*, stone, is a masculine noun, and the proper pronoun to be used in referring to it was *hē*, he. In other words, the gender of the pronoun in relation to its antecedent was both grammatical and logical in Anglo-Saxon, though in Modern English it is only logical. The practical convenience of having distinctive forms of the pronouns to refer to male, female, and sexless objects was obviously the determining reason for the retention of the Anglo-Saxon forms in Middle English and thus in Modern English.

Though number no longer survives as an inflectional characteristic in adjectives, two stray forms for plurals still appear in the demonstrative adjective pronouns *these*, *those*, the plurals of *this*, *that*. It would seem at first thought that there was no greater reason for the retention of plural forms for *this* and *that* than for plural forms of *the*. If one can say *the horse* and *the horses* without fear of misunderstanding, it should also be possible to say *this horse* and *this horses*, *that horse* and *that horses*. And if the demonstratives *this*, *that* had always been used only in adjective position before modified nouns, like the article, it is not probable that the plurals *these*, *those* would have maintained their place in the language. But *this*, *that* could be used also without an accompanying noun, as in *You take this and I will take these*, and in such uses a plural form of the pronoun was too great a convenience to be readily given up. It should be noted also

that *these, those* are not direct survivals from Anglo-Saxon forms but new forms which developed in the Middle English period, that is, at the very time when the language was giving up purely formal distinctions. The support which *these, those* received at this time is an indication therefore that they were practically useful and necessary.

In the pronoun of the second person two important changes have taken place. First the older and etymologically more correct nominative *ye*, which still survives as an archaism in Biblical and poetical English, was replaced by the accusative form *you*. Like all the nouns, this pronoun thus had the same form for the subject as for the object. The second change was the complete dislodgment of the old forms of the singular, *thou, thine, thee* and the substitution for them of the forms of the plural, *you, your, you*, with the result that in Modern English the forms of the singular and the plural of this pronoun are the same. This substitution was extensively made in the language during the Middle English period, although the older forms, *thou, thine, thee*, continued to a limited extent in popular use, as well as in specialized literary uses, well into the modern period. The impulse which brought about this simplification was imitative, and not like those which caused the simplifications previously discussed. In the customary polite usage of French in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when French supplied the models for so much that English was seeking to acquire, the plural forms of the pronoun of the second person were used in direct address. In the beginning this custom passed over into English probably only in fashionable and highly refined speech. Thence it spread rapidly and soon became the common and general custom of the

language. By a special effort the Friends or Quakers have attempted to restore the older forms *thou, thine, thee* to general use. In Quaker usage, however, *thou* of the nominative is frequently replaced by *thee*, just as in standard English, the archaic nominative *ye* yielded to the accusative *you*.

A special development in the pronominal system is to be noted in the Modern English reflexive forms. Grammatically these forms seem contradictory, in that a reflexive like *himself* may agree with a nominative *he*, as *He himself said so*, or a form like *myself*, with a nominative *I*, as in *I myself said so*. Neither of these grammatical paradoxes was present in Anglo-Saxon. In Anglo-Saxon the reflexive idea was expressed simply by repeating the personal pronoun, and *self* in Anglo-Saxon was an intensive adjective, agreeing with whatever noun or pronoun it was inflected to agree with. But the personal pronoun repeated for reflexive meaning was repeated in the accusative case, a typical construction consisting of a nominative personal pronoun, a verb, and an accusative reflexive personal pronoun. It was also the common idiom of Anglo-Saxon when the intensive adjective *self* was used, to use it to agree with the subject but to place it in the order of words after the verb and after the reflexive object. This position in Anglo-Saxon could occasion no syntactical confusion, for the adjective *self* would be inflected to indicate a nominative, not an accusative case. The syntactical arrangement of the Anglo-Saxon sentence would therefore be as follows:

Pronoun subject + verb + pronoun reflexive object + *self*.

Now the common form of the object of the personal pronoun of the third person in the masculine gender, for

example, came to be *him*. This *him* and the adjective *self*, being placed side by side, were then mechanically combined to form a compound word *himself*, which was treated syntactically, in its relation to the other words of the sentence, as though it were simply the word *self*, that is, it was an intensive reflexive pronoun agreeing with the subject. The word is a striking illustration of what propinquity can do, even in language. So likewise *herself*, *itself*, *themselves* are to be explained. But this statement leaves *myself*, *yourself*, *ourselves* unaccounted for. If these compounds were derived from accusative reflexive forms, we ought to have *meself*, *youself*, and *usselves*. This indeed would be the natural expectation. But *self* as an emphasizing word took on more and more substantive value. It came to be felt as a kind of noun, and in Modern English has become completely a noun, as *losing self in the not self*, or *God's own self*. As *self* became more like a noun, the pronoun before it naturally inclined to take the adjective, that is, the possessive form, and *meself*, *youself* thus passed into *myself*, *yourself*. This has been the growing tendency, held in check by the conventions of cultivated speech, but besides the standard *myself*, *yourself*, *ourselves*, popularly forms like *hisself* and *theirselves* are widely current.

The Anglo-Saxon verb has undergone no such thorough reconstruction in its structural forms as the Anglo-Saxon adjective and noun. On the contrary, the verb, like the pronoun, has been remarkably conservative, to the extent even of retaining a number of forms that seem not practically useful. But the English verb started on its career with a relatively elaborate mechanism, and therefore it had more to lose before it could become as simple as some

of the other inflectional groups. Yet with all its elaborateness of form, the Anglo-Saxon verb was already defective in certain inflectional possibilities which were present in other Indo-European languages and which Anglo-Saxon might have inherited from the general parent speech, as Greek and Latin inherited them. For one thing, the Anglo-Saxon verb had no inflectional future tense, and for another, it had no inflectional passive voice. The future was ordinarily expressed in Anglo-Saxon by the present, as it still may be in Modern English. Thus we say, *I am going to Boston*, am now on the way, or *I am going to Boston tomorrow*, tomorrow shall be on the way. Later English has also developed a future sense in several verb phrases, especially verb phrases with *shall* and *will*, but the original lack of an inflectional future in English has never been made up by invention. The passive likewise is expressed by passive verb phrases with forms of the verb *to be*, and these passive verb phrases already in Anglo-Saxon took the place of an inflectional passive.

The verb in Anglo-Saxon varied in its forms to correspond with differences of type, tense, person, number, and mood. The two main types of verbs are those known as the strong and the weak, the strong being verbs that made their past tenses by a change in the radical vowel of the present, as in *rīdan*, to ride, the infinitive and the present tense having the same vowel, *rād*, preterite singular, *ridon*, preterite plural, and *(ge)riden*, past participle. The Modern English forms of this verb are *ride, rode, ridden*, and strong verbs of this kind are usually classed as irregular verbs in Modern English grammars. But all strong verbs did not have the same variations in the

vowels of the tenses as *rīdan*, and in fact the strong verbs of Anglo-Saxon are classifiable in several different classes in accordance with the particular sequence of vowels that appears in each class. Here again the observer is struck by the extraordinarily complicated machinery which the language made use of for this simple purpose of indicating that a word was a verb. For a verb was merely a verb, no matter what class it belonged to, just as a noun was merely a noun, no matter what its type or its gender. The various classes of the strong verb are still inflected in Modern English usage, as in *freeze, froze, frozen, sing, sang, sung, tear, tore, torn, break, broke, broken, shake, shook, shaken, blow, blew, blown,* and in many others, though the exact relationships of the Modern English forms to their Anglo-Saxon originals is often obscured because of the phonetic developments which the various verbs have undergone. A good many Anglo-Saxon strong verbs have disappeared from the language as strong verbs, however, through having changed from the strong to the weak type of tense formation.

The weak verbs of Anglo-Saxon formed their past tenses by the addition of a syllable to the root of the word. Thus *dēman*, to deem, judge, has a past tense *dēmde*, and a past participle *(ge)dēmed*, the corresponding forms of which in Modern English are *deem*, present tense, *deemed*, past tense and past participle. Verbs of this type are usually called regular verbs in Modern English grammars because this has tended to become the prevailing, and in that sense, the regular type in the Modern English verb. As has been mentioned, many older strong verbs went over from the strong to the weak type, Anglo-Saxon *glīdan*,

glād, *glidon*, *gliden* becoming Modern English *glide*, *glided*, Anglo-Saxon *bacan*, *bōc*, *bōcon*, *bacen* becoming Modern English *bake*, *baked*, and so with many others. But of course all strong verbs did not become weak verbs in spite of the obvious gain in economy that would have resulted in having a single type of tense formation in the language. The forms of the strong verbs were too firmly fixed in the traditions of the language, however, to permit their complete elimination. Their characteristic marks were not contained in weak unstressed endings, but within the bodies of the verbs themselves. The same causes that account for the retention of plurals like *feet* and of the case forms of the pronouns thus help to explain likewise the survival of older strong forms of the verbs as exceptions to the prevailing tendency for verbs to take the weak forms. Popular English still responds to this tendency, making *blow*, *blowed*, for standard *blow*, *blew*, *blown*, and *grow*, *growed* for standard *grow*, *grew*, *grown*, and so with many other verbs, and if the restraints of conventional custom were removed, there can be no question but that in time most of the remaining strong verbs would pass over to the regular type. The reasons for the predominance of the weak type are first its comparative simplicity, as compared with the six or seven classes of the strong verb, and second the fact that a noun or other word could be made into a weak verb without destroying its recognizability as the same word, whereas the tense forms of a strong verb could be made only by changing the word beyond recognition. Thus from the noun *bottle* it is easy to make a weak verb *I bottled*, *I have bottled*, but as a strong verb this would have to be something like *I bottle*, present, *I buttle*, preterite, *I have bittle*,

past participle. The making of new verbs was not a very common process in Anglo-Saxon, but it was one of the new language devices which Middle English developed very extensively, and as one of their consequences, the new verbs helped to establish the weak verb as the prevailing type or model for verb formation.

The tense system of Anglo-Saxon was remarkably simple. As has already been mentioned, the language contained no future. It contained, in fact, only a present and a past. Simple as it was, however, the Anglo-Saxon verb maintained certain distinctions in tense forms that were destined to survive only in part. These were the differences in form between the past tense and the past participle as they appeared in the strong verb. The forms of the present tense, including the infinitive, the present participle, and the personal forms of the present tense, all have the same vowel in the radical syllable. But the past participle ordinarily differed from the past tense, and some of these differences have survived in Modern English, as in *ride, rode, ridden, sing, sang, sung.* A tendency manifested itself, however, to reduce all past uses to one form, as in Modern English *find, found, found,* a reasonable enough tendency, since it was in the direction of the drift towards regularity which favored a single form for a single function. Here again this admirable tendency was never carried to the extent of complete regularity. All weak verbs in Modern English have the same form for the past tense and past participle, and many strong verbs do, but occasional hangovers are still present in English with a difference of form.

Variation in the form of the verb to indicate person and in accord with the person of the subject was more extensive

in Anglo-Saxon than it is in Modern English. In a complete inflectional system the verb would always indicate by its form the concord in person with the subject. But Anglo-Saxon did not possess a complete system. The plural forms never indicated distinctions of person, and the first and third persons of the preterite were always alike. The fullest indication of person was in the present singular, as in the modern archaic *I sing, thou singest, he singeth,* corresponding to Anglo-Saxon *ic singe, ðū singest, hē singeth.* Already in Anglo-Saxon times, however, a tendency appeared to level the personal endings of the present tense. This tendency was carried farthest in the northern dialect, where the ending *s* was generalized as an ending for all forms of the present, singular and plural. If this northern use had persisted into Modern English, our present tense would be *I sings, you sings, he sings, we, you, they sings,* the *s* becoming merely the inflection for the present, with no personal significance. In the Middle English period there was more or less dialectal variation in the forms of the present, and the northern custom has left one trace in Modern English in the third singular present in *s.* This is the only personal inflection left in the Modern English verb, and it serves no useful purpose. If it is possible to say *I sang, you sang, he sang* without danger of misunderstanding, it would be equally possible to say *I sing, you sing, he sing.* As other examples have shown, however, consistency was not a virtue that was carried to its limits in those periods of the language which determined its modern shape.

Number in the Anglo-Saxon verb followed a course similar to that of person. In general the Anglo-Saxon verb distinguished plurals from singulars by means of

distinctive endings. The endings for the most part were weak unstressed syllables, however, and therefore shared the general tendency of such syllables to be slighted in pronunciation and ultimately to disappear. Since number would be indicated anyway by the subject, and since the concord between the number inflection of the verb and the number of the subject was merely a matter of grammatical harmony, efficiency in expression on the side of meaning made no demand for the retention of number inflection in the verb. After a certain amount of wavering, the language settled upon a system which has only one surviving indication of number in the verb, the *s* ending of the present, which stands for three things, present tense, third person, and singular number.

The Anglo-Saxon strong verb customarily had a different vowel in the preterite plural from the vowel of the preterite singular. Thus the preterite singular of *rīdan*, to ride, is *rād*, but the preterite plural is *ridon*. None of these preterite plurals have survived as plurals, though when the preterite and the past participle of a strong verb were leveled under one form, sometimes the vowel of the plural survived as the characteristic vowel of the preterit tense, especially when the vowel of the preterite plural was the same as the vowel of the past participle. But the determining element in such developments was probably not the vowel of the preterite plural but the presence of the same vowel in the past participle.

Two moods besides the indicative were marked inflectionally in the Anglo-Saxon verb, the imperative and the optative or subjunctive. The imperative differed very slightly from the indicative in its inflectional forms, and in Modern English, it differs not at all from it. The

subjunctive had as its distinguishing marks those general utility endings, *-e* in the singular, *-en* in the plural. Neither of these was well fitted to resist the tendency towards the dropping of endings in the period of transition, and of course Modern English has no distinctive subjunctive endings. In the third singular present, the omission of the *s* of the indicative makes a subjunctive of it, corresponding to an Anglo-Saxon third singular present subjunctive with a final *e*. Even this is now an archaic use, and aside from occasional forms of the verb *to be* in conditions contrary to fact, the subjunctive meanings of older English are now expressed by a great variety of verb phrases.

Casting a backward glance over this rapid survey of some of the more striking instances of structural change that have taken place within the historical periods of English, the reader will observe that two main causes have been at the bottom of them The first cause was the tendency to obscure the values in pronunciation of inflectional syllables as they stood at the ends of words in unstressed position. As these syllables became obscured in sound, the grammatical values for which the syllables had formerly stood could less effectively be maintained. The consequence was that the syllables themselves tended to disappear and with them their grammatical significances. The thing that saved these grammatical endings from disappearing completely was that some of them, for example, the mark of the plural in nouns, had a logical significance which the language was bound to express in some way and which it therefore expressed by using a part of the traditional materials with which it was provided. The second cause was that drift towards regularity which moved in the direction of reduc-

ing several mechanisms for doing the same linguistic labor, when several were present, to one. Thus nouns tended to become all of one type and verbs tended to follow the lead of the weak verb. But the tendency always stopped short of the complete realization of a perfectly regular simplified system. For it was a tendency of the practical world and of uncontrolled experience in which perfect systems rarely demand a place. It produced a working, not an ideal system in language.

XX

THE ENGLISH VOCABULARY

It is a simple and natural question to ask where the words of the English language ultimately came from, but not so easy to find a simple answer to this question. One thing that complicates the matter is that the conditions under which words come into being are no longer present in the English language and have not been present within historical periods. To invent words is now practically impossible, and yet all the words contained in the English language at some time or other must have been invented. But the period of invention is now closed, and during the whole civilized history of the English language the constructive linguistic process by which new words are made has been almost completely atrophied and inactive. Many words have been added to English within historical times by borrowing, but practically none by out and out invention. It is not impossible to make words that look, sound, and mean something like genuine words, but the psychological conditions which favor this kind of inventiveness and which lead to the adding of such new words to the language in practical use are no longer actively present. Such invented words are really not words until they pass current in general use, and the society in which the English language now exists is no longer willing to receive such new-comers into its circle. The invention of words is a genuinely primitive process in the growth of language. Perhaps one may say that

men invented words without knowing what they were doing, whereas now, although we have very clear notions how the thing may be done, it is no longer possible for us to invent words.

The farthest step backward that may be taken in the direction of the primitive invention of English words must be taken with the aid of comparative grammar. By this evidence one discovers that the great body of the words in the English language have had an ancient history connecting them with other words which occur distributed among the various languages of the Germanic group to which English belongs, or even still more widely distributed among the languages of the Indo-European family, in which the Germanic languages are themselves only a sub-family. But not all Germanic words are generally represented in the Indo-European family. Thus English *sheep* and German *Schaf* are obviously the same word, and certain other Germanic languages have other easily recognizable similar forms. But in Latin, Greek, and the other languages of the Indo-Germanic family, there is no word which may be related to *sheep* in accordance with any known laws of language development. The path along which history leads us with *sheep* ends in the hypothesis of an original word which by common inheritance was distributed among several of the Germanic dialects. But who invented this word? The evidence of general Germanic grammar provides no answer to this question. The word must have been in existence as a full-fledged word before the differentiation of the various Germanic dialects, but comparative Germanic grammar gives no clue as to the circumstances in which the word was created and little evidence of any value as

to the time when it was created. It is not improbable that this word, and many others, was a completely independent creation and never formed a part of the general Indo-European parent speech. But if so, the particular progenitors of the Germanic peoples who invented the word must remain unknown to us.

The conclusions to be derived from the examination of the words common to the vocabularies of the Indo-European languages are much the same. The English words *father*, German *Vater*, Latin *pater*, with similar closely related forms in Celtic, Slavonic, and Sanscrit, all bear evidence to prove the existence of a genuinely primitive unrecorded word of which the historical forms are only variations and modifications. But even this theoretical primitive word can be regarded as primitive only in relation to the later historical forms, not in relation to the very remotely primitive and exceedingly ancient conditions which attended the original creation of what might be called the protoplasmic material for the word *father*. The comparative study of Germanic and Indo-Germanic words may lead the investigator back two thousand, perhaps three thousand years, and yet not bring him within view of the creative processes of the human mind as it first fashioned the sounds of the voice into those entities known as words. These primitive creative processes are so remote that history affords little help in realizing them. Words came into being only slowly and gradually, not by a sudden and complete act of invention. In considering the origins of words from this point of view one must think not in terms of thousands of years, but perhaps in terms of tens of thousands of years.

The comparative study of languages raises certain

definite questions with respect to the original characters of words, and of these one of the most important is the question of roots. What seems to be ultimately the same word often appears in the several Indo-Germanic languages in more or less distant though conceivably related meanings. When such words satisfy the demands of the phonetic developments involved and at the same time call for not too great a stretching of probability in order to hold them together logically, then they are commonly regarded as variations of the same word in the sense that they are derivatives from the same root.

Any good modern dictionary provides an abundance of etymological information of this sort. The modern English word *dough*, for example, has cognates in the several Germanic languages which lead to the supposition of a proto-Germanic form, hypothetically expressed as the root *dhigh-*, to form of clay, to knead. This is represented in Sanscrit by the root *dih-*, to besmear, in Latin, in accordance with certain regular consonant changes, by the root *fig-*, as in *fingere*, *fictum*. A related word in Greek is τεῖχος, wall. Starting from Latin *fingere*, by a direct route one arrives at English *feign*, *feint*, *fiction*, *figment*. The older Germanic root can also be traced in the second syllable of *lady*, and a variant of *dough* is found in the form *duff*, as in *plum duff*. The words that have been cited by no means exhaust all the possible representatives of the central root idea and root form contained in all these words. The special dictionaries of the various Indo-European languages contain numerous further modifications of the same word material. The relationship in meaning of these various words is perhaps apparent enough with the exception of the word *lady*.

What has this word to do with English *dough* or *Latin fingo?* But the Anglo-Saxon form of *lady* is *hlǣfdige*, the first element meaning *loaf*, the second meaning *knead*, a lady being thus originally a loaf-kneader, the one who prepares the bread. This etymology may seem like stretching probability a little too far. But it receives some support from the etymology of the word *lord*. In Anglo-Saxon this word is *hlāford*, a worn down form of *hlāf-weard*, the loaf-ward or guardian, that is, the one who provided the sustaining food for the household. But perhaps this etymology of *lord* also seems like stretching probability a little too far. It is a conceivable etymology, however, and for the moment at least it may be assumed to be probable, or even true.

Another English word which has far-reaching relationships is the verb *may*, with its preterite *might*. In the phrase *might and main* both words are of etymologically the same origin. The other Germanic languages have words of similar meaning and form, and so also have the other Indo-European languages. Sanscrit *mahan*, great, contains the same language element, which likewise appears in Greek μῆχος, contrivance, μηχανή, machine. From these Greek words it is but a short step to Latin *mechanicus*, *machina*, and so to the French and English adaptations of these words. Thus the nouns in *might and main* and the noun *machine* are constructed from the same original material.

If some of the etymologists' groupings of these supposedly related words seem to stretch credibility to the breaking point, it must be acknowledged that as the etymologists' science can rarely provide definitive demonstrations, in many cases there must be room for reasonable

doubt. Perhaps one familiar with the details of language change will not hesitate to accept English *might* and *machine*, English *dough* and *feign*, as containing the same constructive elements of language. But etymological groupings of this kind may be profitably made without implying the dogmatic assertion of the absolute truth of them. The etymologists' groupings may be regarded as convenient summaries of the state of knowledge and of the probabilities with respect to a certain set of words. If the words of a group may be held together without violence to any known phonetic laws and also without violence to logical probability, in the given state of knowledge they may reasonably be taken as related to each other. Sometimes the relationship will be so apparent as scarcely to raise any question. It would occur to no reasonable person to doubt that English *figment* and *fiction* may be carried back to forms of Latin *fingere*, but to connect *fiction* and English *dough* may seem dubious. The English word *hen* is said by some etymologists to be constructed of the same materials, that is, to have the same root, as Latin *canere*, to sing. Phonetic relationships permit this etymology, and so also does logical probability, if one is convinced that a hen might be so named because it is a singing creature. But obviously common sense and judgment must be called in to decide just what logical relationships are reasonable and probable. In such matters opinions will vary, and especially as one reaches back to the remoter period of the history of the language and as one endeavors to relate large groups of highly differentiated words, the greater will be the opportunity for variations of opinion. In such cases the etymologist will not put down his conclu-

sions as gospel truths, but merely as what seem to him under the circumstances the most plausible guesses at the truth. And the users of etymological dictionaries will accept them in the same spirit.

Granting that the words of these and similar groups are genuinely related to each other in the sense that the words in each group are all modifications of some original, or at least common, element, the question still remains how this original element, or root word, came into being. It should be observed, however, that we are really begging the question when we speak of the existence of primitive and original root words. For it is extremely doubtful if any such roots ever formed part of any living language. There is no evidence to support the notion that human beings as they developed language passed through a rudimentary stage in which they employed word-roots of broad and undifferentiated meaning which later ages were to separate into more clearly defined analytic parts. Such a theory would suppose that men thought in generalizations and concepts before they thought in concrete details, a theory altogether improbable and contrary to the nature of the mind as we know it today. Much more reasonable is the supposition that every language has always been highly complicated and differentiated in its vocabulary from the time it reached that dignity and elevation in its development which justified calling it a language. The notion of a root concept for words is really a late and abstract generalization. It is made by the student who observes in a set of languages these words of similar form and meaning and who relates them by the application of general principles to a common center which he calls a root. But the meaning of every word at

any given moment of its actual use in language has always been a definite and specific meaning. Words change in meaning from one specific application to another specific application. Thus the word *dough*, which conceivably meant in the first place to work in clay, acquired a meaning by a not improbable transition which limited it to a mixture of flour and water. But this meaning has then been extended to designate any soft and pasty mass. It has been extended still further, and in slang, money is often called dough, perhaps because it is the ultimate staff of life. These extensions are always made, however, one step at a time, from one specific sense to another. The logical transition through which *dough* came to mean money is not obvious and it would seem to offer on the whole as many difficulties as the transition from the hypothetical root-form *dhigh-*, to form of clay, to knead, to Latin *fingere, fictum*. Transitions like this, however, are continually present in all living language, and experience shows that some of them are extraordinarily subtle and ingenious. The process is usually one of figurative transference or of specific limitation of meaning. For example, the word *machine* is a general word, but the general word may narrow to specific senses, and a machine then designates a sewing-machine or an automobile or a political machine. Such changes are made without reference to a root-meaning or to general relationships in a group. Only after a chain of meanings has been developed, link by link, does the etymologist and student of language appear with his analytic explanation of the way in which unity persists in the midst of diversity. The root meaning which he then constructs for all the words of a group is the resultant of the development which has taken place, not the cause of it.

If we deny that mankind ever spoke in root-words which corresponded to generalized abstractions or concepts in thought, and if, on the contrary, we believe that words from the very beginning have been used with immediate and specific applications, the mystery of the invention of words nevertheless remains still to be solved. As a first approach to this mystery, one may inquire which in all probability came first, words or sentences, the word as a unit or the word in context. Here again, however, this question leads to the further question whether primitive man first thought in abstractions or in specific associations. For the word detached from context is an abstraction. The word *house* means no particular house, no building of any precisely definable form or structure. It is merely a dead word in a dictionary. It has no living meaning as an element of speech until it is connected with other words in the expression of some kind of thought of concern to some person who is interested in a house. And so undoubtedly it must have been in the remote days of the invention of words. Under the stress of some immediate necessity of naming an object, not as a theoretical or abstract generalization, but as a thing perhaps immediately alluring or threatening, something like a word issued from the lips of some primitive ancestor. When the situation occurred again, perhaps something similar was repeated. In the hubbub of chatterings, growls, yells of primitive human life, this sound may have caught the ear of the neighbors of the person who first used it. It may have been repeated by him and by them until a habit was fixed. The same sound would thus always mean the same object, and at first probably always in the same context. It would thus become a genuine word. Having

become established in one context, in one sequence of jabberings, chatterings, shriekings, it might be extended to a different sequence and ultimately to a variety of situations in which the same object might figure. The theorist and grammarian might then come along, and after the event, discover that this sound repeated in the variety of situations named the same object and was therefore a definitely arrived word in the language. Such a discovery might be made even in very early stages of the development of the language. It would be one of the steps by which the mind acquired consciousness of itself and of its mental processes. As more and more sounds took on these habitual and extensible significances, the vocabulary of the language would grow until in the end all of the sounds employed in the expression of thought would be of this character. The mutterings, growlings, and other animal noises of pre-lingual human life which were not generalized into significant habits would gradually be dropped under the exactions of the increasing politeness of human conversation. In civilized languages they have disappeared completely, except as a few survive in enfeebled forms in laughter, sighs, sniffs of contempt, or snorts of rage. Some of these have taken on a conventionalized form which can appear even in printing and writing and which thus gives them almost the character of words. Forms like *pshaw*, *humph*, *heigh-ho*, *pish*, *ho*, *ha-ha* are a few obvious illustrations.

It is more reasonable, therefore, to think of words as gradually growing and developing in the complexity of related ideas than as being invented. A gradual process of growth is quite a different thing from invention. The latter implies a certain degree of conscious intention and

direction, but the former may take place without design. The question of the origins or invention of words thus becomes a part of the whole question of the origins or invention of language, for words were not invented as separate or detachable parts of language. Their origins were implicated in the whole process of the rise and growth of language. To explain how the faculty of speech appeared in the human mind and how it fixed itself there is a task for the psychologist. If the psychologist can explain these facts of mental evolution, he will at the same time explain the ways in which the words of primitive human speech came into being.

The historically recorded forms of the language manifestly provide the student with materials more definitely under his control than the somewhat theoretical conclusions to be drawn from primitive psychology. From this historical point of view, the English vocabulary may be examined as a part of the traditional culture of the English people. The study begins with the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxon period as the foundation upon which all later additions to the language were imposed. The vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons is of course known to us now only from their surviving literary records. These records are abundant enough, however, to give us an adequate notion of the vocabulary of the times. They include works of history, philosophy, theology, science, and poetry, and they demonstrate the fact that the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons was sufficiently rich and varied to permit the composition in it of writings profound in thought and stylistically distinguished and pleasing.

The language which the first Anglo-Saxon settlers brought to England at the middle of the fifth century

was an almost pure Teutonic language. It contained practically no elements other than those derived from the common source of all the Germanic languages. Perhaps a few words of Latin origin may have penetrated to the early homes of the Anglo-Saxons on the continent, the word for wine, for money, for street, and a few others that might be carried by the Roman traders and by the soldiers of the military camps. These few words the Anglo-Saxons may have incorporated into their vocabulary before they left their Continental homes and thus have brought them to England as parts of their familiar speech. At the most, however, such words could have been only a handful, merely sufficient to indicate the far-reaching influence of the Romans in the centuries before the beginning of the history of the English as a separate people.

As compared with the later periods of the English language, the most notable characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary is its lack of synonyms. For certain ideas a number of different words were available, for such ideas as spear, sword, ocean, ship. But these were all simple and concrete ideas, and often the synonyms of this kind were poetic elaborations which probably formed no part of the everyday vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons. For the more abstract and psychological ideas, however, a single word in Anglo-Saxon ordinarily covered the ground which requires a dozen or more words of Modern English. The word *mōd*, for example, in Anglo-Saxon cannot be translated always and simply by its Modern English equivalent, *mood*. In fact Anglo-Saxon *mōd* probably never meant what we would express today by the word *mood*. It meant the various shades of meaning expressed by *spirit, courage, good cheer, valor, steadiness, firmness*, and

similar words. From the noun *mōd* was made an adjective *mōdig*, which did not mean moody, but valiant, courageous, resolute, and the like. From this same word was made the compound with *ofer-*, 'over,' giving *ofer-mōd*, which meant too much spirit, courage, etc., that is, pride, rashness, and similar shades of meaning. Another compound was made with *rūm-*, Modern English *room*, that is, space, extensiveness, giving *rūm-mōd*, spacious-minded, magnanimous. A compound with *ān-*, 'one,' seems to emphasize the central idea of resoluteness in the word, and *ān-mōd* might be translated in Modern English by determined or quite resolved. There are still other compounds and uses of *mōd* in Anglo-Saxon, all playing about the large and loosely defined central meaning of the word. But though the meaning of *mōd* is thus extensive and varied in Anglo-Saxon, by no means does it follow that the meaning in any particular use is obscure. On the contrary, the continually present central idea of the word in a simple language like Anglo-Saxon often gives to the word a definiteness, a concreteness, and intimacy of meaning which the highly differentiated vocabulary of Modern English may lack. Thus the words *ofer-mōd*, *rūm-mōd*, are directly descriptive of their meanings, and any Anglo-Saxon who knew his language at all could have had no difficulty in grasping precisely the meanings intended by the words. But the synonyms of Modern English, 'insolence,' 'presumption,' 'strenuosity,' for example for *ofer-mōd*, 'magnanimous,' 'generous,' 'comprehensive,' for *rūm-mōd*, do not carry to the common understanding of the people who use English today a directly intelligible description of their meaning. In fact, only the student of Latin knows the meanings of the

constructive elements of these words. The Anglo-Saxon, however, did not need to appeal to Latin to understand the meanings even of his most elaborately compounded and abstract words. He interpreted them in the light of the general elements of his vocabulary of which they were composed. A wealth of synonyms, a highly differentiated vocabulary, is not necessarily an indication that the general habits of thinking of the people to whom the language belongs are highly differentiated, subtle, and precise. A variety of synonyms may indicate an obscured and fumbling feeling for meaning as compared with a simple and broad definition of meaning.

The later history of this foundation Anglo-Saxon vocabulary has been partly a history of survivals, partly of transformations, and partly of complete losses. On the whole, much the greater part of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary still exists in the language today. In a passage of one hundred words in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle recording an event for the year 755, fourteen of the words used have completely dropped out of the language. Of the remainder, three would be familiar to persons interested in the archaic or dialectal forms of the language in the words *atheling*, *mickle*, and *yare*. But the remaining eighty-three words persist in forms still current in the everyday, familiar use of the language. These figures hold in general for the vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons, and it is fair to say that approximately four-fifths of it still appears in the English vocabulary today. The meanings and forms of the words are often changed, but perhaps not so much as might be expected in the course of a thousand years.

Additions to this original Teutonic word-stock of the

Anglo-Saxons could be made only as the Anglo-Saxons themselves came into contact with peoples speaking different languages. As a result of such contacts they might borrow words. Now when the Anglo-Saxons first came to England, the two languages most extensively used on the island were Latin and Celtic. Latin was spoken by the Roman conquerors of England whose occupation of the island was begun by Julius Caesar. The Roman rule in Britain had lasted for four centuries and in that time a rich Latin civilization had grown up in England. The Celtic language was spoken by those earlier inhabitants of Britain who had been conquered by the Romans, and in large part assimilated by them. In the more remote and un-Romanized parts of Britain, however, the Celts and their language still survived.

When one studies the early vocabulary of the Anglo-Saxons, however, one is struck by the fact that very few words were borrowed by them from the Romanized inhabitants of Britain or from the Celts. But the reason for this is readily found. The Anglo-Saxons came to England as military conquerors. They became the masters and possessors of the island by the simple process of destroying the claims to property and the organization of society which they found on their arrival. In such circumstances the conquering people rarely borrows much from the culture of the conquered people. Moreover, the Anglo-Saxons when they came to England had no literary traditions of their own. They had no scholars or authors who might have appreciated the fact that the Romans in Britain possessed a higher civilization than their own, and who might have attempted to appropriate some of this civilization by incorporating Latin elements into

their language. On the contrary, borrowing would have had to be made by the direct method of spoken social intercourse, and this, as has previously been pointed out, probably took place only in a very limited way. The whole manner of life of the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain tended to prevent amalgamation with the Romans and Celts who were already settled on the land. The Anglo-Saxons did not live in towns or large communities, but each man settled where he found a spot most suited to his taste. These separate communities lived very much to themselves, and therefore were little exposed to influences upon their speech and other customs from without.

The next important contact of the Anglo-Saxons with a foreign language was also with the language of the Romans. In the year 596 Roman missionaries came to England, bearing not only the doctrines of the Roman church to the English, but also the Latin tongue, as the accepted scholarly and learned language of the times. The Anglo-Saxons became apt pupils. Schools flourished in England, and in an incredibly short time, seats of learning in connection with the monasteries sprang up in various parts of England. As a result of the introduction of this learned ecclesiastical Roman culture into England, a great many Latin words came into the language. These words were mostly church words, like the words *church*, *priest*, *abbott*, *candle*, *organ*, or learned words connected with the scholarly studies of the monks, especially mathematical and botanical terms, or words which came in with the new customs and manners of living of the monks, such as the words for *kitchen*, *butter*, *cheese*, *cup*, *fork*, and others. All of these Latin borrowed words were in the first place

learned words, that is, words transferred from Latin to English by scholars who knew Latin. Many of them never became anything else, but were used only as a modern scientist might use the technical words of his profession. But many on the other hand became completely naturalized and passed into familiar daily use. The number all told of these Anglo-Saxon Latin borrowings was considerable when one thinks of the original Teutonic simplicity of the Anglo-Saxon language, but insignificant in comparison with the later borrowings of English in the Middle and Modern English periods. The main body of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary throughout the whole of the period remained overwhelmingly Teutonic. Even scholars writing Anglo-Saxon employed an almost pure Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, with only now and then a very occasional word of Latin origin. The native elements of the vocabulary were often used with new and extended meanings, but on the whole the Anglo-Saxons managed to get along remarkably well with their original supply of Teutonic words.

About three centuries after their arrival in England, the Anglo-Saxons themselves were compelled to meet the attacks of foreign invaders. These new enemies were the Teutonic kinsmen of the Anglo-Saxons from Denmark and the Scandinavian peninsula known in history as the Northmen. Their attacks upon the English became serious about the middle of the eighth century, and though there were intermissions, they continued until in the early eleventh century, in the days of King Canute, a Danish king occupied both the throne of Denmark and of England. The number of Northmen who settled in England must have been very large, and from them a con-

siderable number of words passed into Anglo-Saxon English. These words arose in a variety of associations, in connection with boats and sea-faring, in connection with warfare, in family and social relationships, and not a few in connection with the political and governmental organization of the country.

Though they are interesting historically, neither the Latin nor Scandinavian borrowings of Anglo-Saxon were numerous or important enough to affect the general character of the language of the period. Anglo-Saxon remained essentially the same in its vocabulary to the time when it changed into Middle English. One of the striking differences which distinguishes Middle English from Anglo-Saxon is the astonishing increase of the vocabulary of the Middle English period. This increase came through borrowings from French. As one would naturally expect, the Norman Conquest prepared the way for an influence of French upon English. If history had repeated itself, French would indeed have crowded English out completely, just as five or six centuries earlier, the language of the Anglo-Saxons had crowded Latin and Celtic out. But the English people themselves were not actually crowded out. They remained on the soil, speaking their own language, and it was this language of the common people of England which eventually rose to the surface again as the national speech and as the one in which Chaucer and many other Middle English authors composed their works.

Though French words undoubtedly began to make their way into English at the time of the Conquest and even a little before, it is nevertheless true that the great body of the French borrowed words in English did not

enter the language until several centuries later, and then not as a direct result of the Conquest. The Conquest was military and political, but most of the Middle English borrowings from French entered the language through literary and social channels. At about the year 1100, English literature touched perhaps the lowest level of neglect and inaction that it has ever reached. The older culture of the Anglo-Saxons was forgotten, and nothing new had yet developed to take its place. Near the beginning of the thirteenth century, however, evidences appeared of a revival of interest in writing and letters. The feeble beginnings of a new national literature gained in strength until by the early part of the fourteenth century a flourishing school of English literature was in existence. This literature was not a revival, either in language or in content, of the literature of the Anglo-Saxons. It was based upon new models, and these models were French. At the time when the new English literary movement was taking form, the French were the leaders in the European intellectual and literary world. It was therefore natural for the English to build their new literary culture on the basis of French. In France the romantic tale of love and adventure had been specially developed, and this form of literary entertainment appealed strongly to English interest. Many of the French romances were translated into English and new ones in English were written after the French model. In the process, a great many French words were transferred to English and thus passed into general use. These French words were at first familiar only to the upper classes. They circulated only in the fashionable and intellectual portions of English society in the beginning, and some of them to this day

pertain rather to the formal than to the everyday vocabulary of English. Words like *dignity*, *reverence*, *chivalry*, *valor*, belong to the aristocracy of the English vocabulary. But all the French borrowings have not remained thus exclusive and dignified. Some of the most common and familiar words of present English may have been originally fashionable French borrowings, but long use has relieved them of this special quality. Thus the word *chair* was taken from French and replaced the native English word *stōl*, stool, and *table* replaced older *board*, *cup* replaced *horn*, and a variety of other Anglo-Saxon words for a drinking vessel. Old ideas were thus expressed in new French terms. The influence of French at this time, however, was not limited to an exchange of words. New ideas, new sentiments, new moods and general attitudes of mind also came into English experience through the medium of French and were consequently expressed in that language. It is not too much to say, therefore, that the English language and the English mind were almost completely made over in consequence of the influence of French in the Middle English period. This influence was at its highest in the century from 1300 to 1400. By this latter year, the year of Chaucer's death, the English vocabulary had changed from the original simplicity of the Anglo-Saxon period to the kind of vocabulary we are familiar with today. Its treasury of words had been enormously increased, and a new tone or stylistic possibility had been brought into it. For the language now possessed two levels of expression, the older simpler style, based on an Anglo-Saxon foundation, and the newer literary, formal, and cultivated style, derived from French.

This habit of borrowing words from French, begun in

the thirteenth century, has never been altogether discontinued in the English language. It is relatively easy for French words to establish themselves in English. At certain times, for example, during the years of the Stuart kings, the relations between England and France have been particularly close, and French words then came into English readily and abundantly. But at all times, in America as in England, the French language has been regarded admiringly as the speech of a people who were leaders in the artistic, literary, and intellectual life of the world. The conditions have thus been favorable to the transferring of words from French to English. In the study of French words in English, this long continued borrowing requires therefore that attention be paid to the chronology of the borrowings. Some French words in English are of very recent origin, like *bicycle*, *automobile*, *chauffeur*, *garage*, and numerous others, and the only way in which the various chronological levels of the French borrowed words in English can be determined is by consulting an historical dictionary and observing the time of their earliest occurrence.

French may be described as Latin once removed, but the next great section of borrowed words in English came from Latin directly. These words entered English as a result of the renewed interest in classical literature and the classical languages which accompanied the Renascence in England in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Naturally these words to begin with were learned words. They were Latin words adapted to English forms by scholars who knew Latin and who were eager to transfer as much as possible of the admired classical language to their native tongue. In this process of enriching English

with Latin borrowings, or inkhorn terms, as they were often called, enormous numbers of new words came into the language. Some of them did not come in very far or stay very long, for these Renascence enrichers were often fantastically extravagant in their zeal for Latinisms. One will in consequence find many new Latin words in the writings of such sixteenth century stylists as Nashe, Harvey, Lyly, Spenser, and others, that have not come down to Modern English. But if many of these learned innovations are now unfamiliar, in a surprisingly large number of instances the originally learned Renascence borrowings have become necessary everyday words of the language. For example, a great many of the English verbs in *-ate*, like *situate*, *contemplate*, *dedicate*, *educate*, came into the language at this time, and hundreds of words are now used in familiar speech without any realization that they were made English words by the stroke of the pen. The extensive popularization of these Latin words is another indication of the fact that much of the development of the English language in modern times has been a literary development. Through reading and writing, through books, newspapers, and magazines, many originally learned words have become so completely popularized that they are used as freely in colloquial discourse as any of the words of pure native origin. Latin, like French, has continued to be a source from which new words have been brought into English, especially new technical and scientific terms. To some extent such terms have also been taken from Greek, as for example, *argon*, *electron*, *telephone*, *telegram*, *gramophone*, *phonograph*, but Greek has never been as freely drawn upon for English technical terms as Latin. Modern trade names for articles of

manufacture are often taken from Latin or Greek, probably in many instances because the person who invented the article was himself a chemist or scientist of some kind and consequently accustomed to giving classical names to new compounds or inventions. Thus words like *sapolio*, *oleomargarine*, *brillo*, a name for steel wool used in polishing, *fermillac*, fermented milk, *sozodont*, the name of a tooth powder, and dozens of others like these betray at least a moderate degree of familiarity with the classical languages.

In general the chief additions to the English vocabulary in the last three centuries have entered either through the channel of travel, commerce, and business, or of science, invention, and manufacturing. The world-wide character of modern travel and commerce has made English people familiar with many objects unknown to earlier generations, and with the new objects have come new names, as for example, *banana*, *chicle*, *kimono*, *pajamas*, *coffee*, *tea*, *chocolate*, *cocoa*, *vanilla*, *goulash*, *spaghetti*, *macaroni*, *paprika*, *chilli*, *sago*, *tapioca*, *yam*, *kangaroo*, *caviare*, *shampoo*, *bungalow*, *bamboo*, *mammoth*. These are but a few illustrations chosen at random from the great number of borrowings of Modern English, each one of which carries with it an interesting story in the development of modern civilization.

The vocabulary of science is naturally a continually growing vocabulary, though most of the new terms used in any particular branch of science are likely to remain purely scientific and technical. But a certain number even of abstruse scientific terms pass over into general use. From the science of biology, for example, have come the popular uses of words like *germ*, *bacillus*, *immune*,

heredity, *environment* (an older word in new applications), and at any moment, a particular fad may cause some technical scientific term to become popularly current, as for example *eugenics*, or *calories*, or *vitamins*, or *auto-suggestion*, or *mental complex*, in the speech of today. As the fads which make these words popularly interesting die out, the words will probably disappear from general use. But in all likelihood some few will remain and become permanent additions to the vocabulary. It is in such ways that the English vocabulary grows.

Modern medicine has likewise familiarized even the untechnical person with many new technical terms to such a degree that the terms pass current in everyday speech. Such words as *clinic*, *diagnosis*, *convalescence* are so familiar that one forgets how learned they are in origin. The names of diseases are in many instances derived from classical sources, and of these names the man of today is familiar with a much greater number than were any of his ancestors. This does not necessarily mean that diseases are more numerous than they ever were in the past, but it means merely that modern medical science has greatly amplified the descriptive terminology of medicine. Such learned words as *tuberculosis*, *appendicitis*, *pneumonia*, *typhoid*, have thus become household terms. The technical knowledge of the scientific student of medicine as it becomes popularized carries with it a certain amount of his technical vocabulary.

As the result of nearly a thousand years of borrowing, the English language today possesses a much richer vocabulary than that of the Anglo-Saxon founders of the race. By a generous estimate the vocabulary of the extant monuments of Anglo-Saxon literature, counting

compounds as well as simple words, is about thirty thousand words. Modern dictionary makers boast of their three or four hundred thousand words. These figures raise the question of the extent of the English vocabulary. But before any attempt can be made to answer this question, some system or plan for counting the words of the language must be agreed upon. A list of all the words that have ever been used in the English language, obsolete as well as living words, technical, scientific, popular or learned, colloquial, slang and vulgar, common and proper, would probably be four or five times as long as the approximately four hundred thousand words of the contemporary practical dictionaries. An historical compilation of this kind, however, would not represent the working vocabulary of any individual. It could be made only by the collecting zeal of the scholar, and it would be no indication of the extent of the vocabulary of the language in daily living use. In order to secure statistics of any significance, one must indeed turn to the language of individuals. The vocabulary of the language does not live in the dictionaries, but only in the minds of individuals.

Estimates of the size of the vocabularies of different persons as they have been given vary widely. Most of these estimates, however, are mere guesses upon which no dependence can be placed. Trustworthy conclusions can be reached only by some method of exact counting, and as individuals differ greatly in the extent of their vocabulary, generalizations from specific observations must be made cautiously. One way of estimating the size of a vocabulary would be to count the number of different words in a particular book, or in the writings of an author. The number of words in *Robinson Crusoe* has

been counted as between five and six thousand.[1] Shakspere used over twenty-four thousand words, and Milton, in his poems alone, used 11,377. Cowper used 11,284, Shelley 15,957, and Tennyson, in an incomplete count of his poems, used 10,574 words.[2] In the Old Testament alone by computation there are 8,674 words.[3]

Manifestly, however, the number of words an author uses in writing would always be smaller than the number of words that he was familiar with. Especially in writing of a conventional literary kind the whole group of words of technical, commonplace, and colloquial character would find no place. On the other hand it is true that in literature certain words may be used which would not ordinarily be used in conversation. The person of average education, moreover, is familiar with a great many words, in the sense that he knows their meanings when he comes across them, which of his own initiative he would never use. Such words, however, may fairly be counted as parts of his vocabulary. The average vocabulary under command of students in the first year of the high school in a particular set of experiments was 15,640 words. The average college students' vocabulary has been estimated at 85,000 words. "This is doubtless far too low, as the figures are computed on the basis that the test represents only 250,000 words, whereas the dictionary, exclusive of proper names, contains about 375,000. It seems scarcely too much to say that, at the time of graduation, a college student should be in command of 100,000 words, the estimation having for its basis the dictionary vocabulary

[1] Kirkpatrick, *Science*, 18, 108 (August 21, 1891).
[2] See Gerlach, *Vocabulary Studies*, p. 14.
[3] Vizetelly, *Essentials of English Speech*, p. 215.

exclusive of biographical and geographical terms. In addition to the 100,000 words, more or less, which constitute the individual's vocabulary as estimated, we must not lose sight of the fact that he knows countless words which do not appear in any dictionary. Thus there are thousands of familiar biographical and geographical names. Consider the immense number of purely local proper names known to everyone in his particular locality which, for that individual and that locality, are an indication of general intelligence. Therefore, to the 100,000 word vocabulary, let us add all the names of persons and places familiar to the individual: let us also add the names of characters of books; names of personified objects, as ships for instance; brands of goods; slang expressions and colloquialisms; and a host of other familiar terms which are not to be found in any dictionary — and the result is an indefinitely large, truly appalling, vocabulary."[1]

After all, therefore, the dictionary is not the most enlightening source of information as to the extent of the English vocabulary. Dictionaries are for the most part encyclopedias of out of the way lexicographical information. From this point of view many words are justifiably included in an English dictionary which no person ever hears from the lips of people speaking English. Only by a wide extension of the meaning of the term can such words be said to belong to the English vocabulary. Hundreds of words like *exsiliency*, *fatiscence*, *favaginous* and *favillous*, like *immissivity*, *limosis*, and *limotherapia* may be found in the pages of the larger dictionaries, and perhaps such words may be said to be in the English

[1] Gerlach, p. 78.

language. But they are not in the practical language of many people. The test of the really essential character of the English vocabulary is not to be found in the rare and casual appearance of words in the language, but in those words by means of which the normal life of English speaking people is conducted. Instead of merely counting words, therefore, one may profitably count the number of times words are used in particular circumstances. The words most frequently used in any group will naturally be those most necessary to the purposes of the language for the group and most significant for their language. Some statistics are already available with respect to the frequency of occurrence of words, and it is in this direction that further investigation of the elements of the English vocabulary promises the most interesting results. What the larger dictionaries have been at is the same old game of trying to capture and cage the language as a whole. When the dictionary makers have collected three or four hundred thousand words, they print them within the confines of two covers and announce that here is a dictionary of *the language*. In reality their collections do not make a language but a monstrosity — a very useful monstrosity for one who is seeking information at particular points. But English does not exist as *a language*. It exists only as an infinite number of languages in the minds of the men and women who use it. What we need now is not a dictionary of the language, but a number of dictionaries constructed in relation to the language habits and requirements of groups of persons. The large dictionaries have become encyclopedias, and only by a new method and a new selection of detail can dictionaries be made which reflect the actual conditions of speech in its intimate moments of life and growth.

XXI

ENGLISH SOUNDS

WHAT is there for the student of English to know about the sounds of the language? Much more than the person who has not reflected on the subject is likely to suppose. Sounds may be described as the protoplasmic material of speech. Before language existed, the sounds of the human voice existed. They were the primitive raw material out of which, in the course of human development, the speech of rational mankind was to be made. They remain to this day the simplest and most fundamental elements in speech. The study of the sounds of speech throws light on all the aspects of speech. To the modern professional student of language, this is indeed the most significant of all the ways of studying language. Just as the biologist is likely to find the study of primitive forms, of protozoa and germs, more rewarding than the study of specimens in the highest and latest processes of development, so also the philologist finds in the study of the sounds of speech the best approach to the art of speech as it has been used in the elaborated forms of human communication.

The first thing a student of English ought to know about the sounds of his language is how to observe and how to recognize these sounds. It might seem that this would be a natural and instinctive acquirement, but such is far from being the truth. On the whole, people are not closely observant of the sounds of their speech. The

reason for this is simple enough. Ordinarily what one is interested in is not the sounds contained in words but the meanings expressed by them. We use language because we wish to convey ideas, not merely because we wish to make sounds. And as soon as we have grasped the idea expressed by the sounds, or think we have grasped it, we pay no more attention to the sounds. They were merely the medium of transmission, the container, but our interest centers in the content, not in the container. And moreover we are quick to grasp at a meaning from a very slight hint of sound. We do not demand that all words shall be sharply and distinctly pronounced. If enough words are pronounced with sufficient clearness to enable us to guess at the general drift of the meaning, we do not often waste time trying to hear just how the various sounds are made and delivered. These are some of the influences which conspire to make us neglectful and unobservant of sounds, and unskilled in disentangling and analyzing them. Moreover, sounds as elements of speech have no existence apart from the words and the context in which they occur. To detach a sound from all other language relations is a very artificial thing to do. It is a kind of vivisection, for a sound in speech can be segregated and dissected only by destroying the living spoken word in which it occurs. The study of speech sounds in themselves is not a natural activity of speech, but it is the work of the scientist and analyzer of speech.

For the reasons just given, it therefore often happens that persons who are entirely familiar with the sounds of the language from the point of view of the practical use of the language, persons who have employed the language freely from childhood, are nevertheless unable to dis-

tinguish clearly between several more or less similar sounds, and still less are able to tell just what it is that gives any sound its particular quality. When confronted with a language situation like this which they cannot analyze, such persons are inclined to put the blame on their hearing. They say they have no ear for sounds. But unless their hearing is abnormal and diseased, which is rarely the case, they must hear just as other persons hear. Hearing is a physical matter, resulting from the action of sound waves upon membranes in the ear. If the sound waves are there and the ear is there, hearing must result. But the truth is that those persons who say they have no ear for sounds merely have not cultivated their hearing in the distinguishing of sounds. This statement can usually be proved by experiment. For example, when the voiced and the voiceless sounds of *th* are segregated, the two different sounds of *th* in *thin* and in *that*, many persons say they can hear no difference between the two. But when the two words *wreath* and *wreathe* are pronounced, they immediately recognize these as two words, although the only difference in them is that the *th* of *wreath* is voiceless and the *th* of *wreathe* is voiced.

Though the study of speech sounds is an artificial occupation, it is none the less an important and useful one. All science is artificial, but many of the by-products of a science may be practically valuable. It is so with phonology, or the science of the sounds of speech. The study of the sounds of speech is significant both for the understanding of contemporary living speech and for the understanding of the historical processes of the language. As the sounds of contemporary living speech are the only ones that can be brought under direct observation, they

should naturally be made the starting point for all phonological study. And as every person can know his own speech better than the speech of any other person, the necessity of immediate experiment and observation is equally apparent.

The most fruitful method of study of the sounds of one's own speech starts with the natural auditory impressions of the sounds and then proceeds to their physiological analysis. For example, the test of ordinary experience, through our ears, assures us that the final consonants in *wreath* and *wreathe* are different. But how are they different? Merely on the basis of auditory impression, it would be very difficult to describe this difference. To call one a soft and the other a hard sound, one a sharp sound and the other a dull sound, would be very inadequate. The fact is that the impressions of the ear are not fixed and definite enough to permit the language to develop exactly descriptive names for them. When one attempts to describe a sound, one is driven to metaphorical terms like soft and hard, sharp and dull, rough and smooth, terms which really belong to other sense impressions and have nothing to do with hearing. The terms that have been mentioned go in pairs. A soft sound is antithetic to a hard sound, a sharp sound to a dull sound. But if one wanted to describe a sound without relation to any other sound, an antithesis of this kind would not be of any help. The sound of *th* in *thin* might then be described merely as a hissing sound, a description not absolutely useless but certainly generously inclusive, since sounds like *s*, *f*, *sh* must also share the term hissing with *th*.

The element of definiteness and precision in the description of sounds must be sought in the manner of their

physiological formation. For on the physiological side of speech, one has not to do with impressions but with controllable physical facts. It is possible to describe the sound of English *th* in *thin* from the point of view of its physiological formation so exactly that a person who had never made the sound before would be able to make it. The sound is made by closing, or almost closing, the teeth, pressing the point of the tongue firmly against the lower edge of the upper teeth, and then forcibly expelling the breath through the openings between the teeth. This description so far applies also to the *th* in *that*, but *th* in *that* has something more in it than *th* in *thin*. It has vibrations of the vocal chords. The person who says he can hear no difference between voiceless and voiced *th* can be made to hear and to see this difference by analyzing the two sounds physiologically. And the Frenchman or German who thinks his speech organs do not permit him to pronounce English *th* correctly, can be made to pronounce this sound with ease merely by showing him how to examine the mechanism of its production.

The number of sounds which one would have to take account of in making a survey of the working elements of English speech on the phonetic side is not prohibitively great. The shadings and waverings of English speech are undoubtedly limitless in number, but for practical purposes it is possible to relate all subtleties of shading to some two-score sounds which may be described as the type sounds or phonemes of the English language. These phonemes therefore do not exhaust all the sounds or variations of sounds which are distinguishable even by the untrained ear. The two vowels of *city*, for example, are not quite the same, and just as obviously the sounds repre-

sented by *l* and the sounds represented by *k* in the two words *lock*, *leek* are not exactly the same. One might speak here of two short *i* sounds, of two *l* and two *k* sounds, or better of a phoneme which includes both vowels of *city*, of another which would include both the *l* of *lock* and the *l* of *leek*, of a *k*-phoneme which would include both the *k* of *lock* and of *leek*. The principle according to which the inclusiveness of a phoneme is determined is that shadings and variations of sound which are never distinguishing for meaning in words may be represented by the same phoneme. Thus, though one may readily distinguish between the two vowels of *city*, there is no word in the language the meaning of which turns on this distinction. If the sounds of speech are regarded strictly from the point of view of physics, it would be inaccurate to group two distinguishable sounds under one head. Thus the two vowels of *city* are not the same, each therefore is itself alone, and one cannot be said to be a variation of the other, or both a variation of some third vowel. But this is not quite what the classification of sounds under phonemes implies. A phoneme is not a standard or ideal sound to which others are relatable as variants, but a phoneme, through its representation by a symbol, may stand for several different shadings of sound within the limits that have been described. And though this grouping of sounds under phonemes may not be in accord with strict demands of physics, it is in accord with the demands of speech. For speech sounds are never merely physical manifestations, but some relationship to meaning is always present in the use of every speech sound.

Needless to say the phonemes of English speech are

not in all instances adequately represented by the letters of the English alphabet. The language has more sounds than it has letters of the alphabet, and one letter sometimes does duty for several sounds. In the following description the letters of the alphabet will therefore be supplemented by certain phonetic symbols in square brackets, about which more will be said later. Two dots after a phonetic symbol indicate that the vowel represented by it is long. Thus the letter *a* has the value of [ɑː] in *father*, of [æ] in *hat*, of [eː] in *hate*, of [ɔː] in *call*, and in the speech of some persons, of [aː] in *laugh*, *dance*, and similar words. The letter *a* may also have the value of [ə] in *arise*. Here we have six of the familiar sounds of English. Then the letter *e* has the value of [iː] in *mete*, of [ɛ] in *met*, of [ə̀ː] in *mercy*. The value of [iː] in *mete* may also be expressed by *ee* in *meet* and *ea* in *meat*, but these are merely different spellings which indicate nothing different in the sound. The letter *i* may have the value of [ɪ] in *sit*, and of a diphthongal sound [aɪ] in *site*. But this diphthong contains no new elements, being made up merely of [a] as in *laugh* and [ɪ] as in *sit*. The letter *o* has one new sound to be added to those already given, the sound of [oː] in *note*. The letter *u* adds several new sounds, [uː] in *rude*, [ʌ] in *cut*, and a diphthongal sound [juː] in *mute*. When *o* is doubled it may have a new sound, the sound of [ʊ] in *book*. By the combination of various of these simple sounds, certain diphthongal sounds are made in English, [aɪ] in *site*, already mentioned, [ɑʊ] in *house*, [eɪ], [oʊ] as in *grey*, *grow*, [ɔɪ] in *boil*, and several other combinations. A few vowel sounds occur in earlier stages of English which have now no place in the language, and these also would have to be taken into account in any his-

torical study of English sounds, especially the sound of [y] as in German *grün*, and [ø] as in German *Goethe*.

The consonantal sounds are more numerous than the vocalic sounds. Among them are the sound of [p] in *pay*, of [b] in *bay*, of [t] in *to*, of [d] in *do*, of [k] in *cap*, of [g] in *gap*. The sound of [s] appears in *rice*, of [z] in *rise*. In *then* the initial consonant is [ð], in *thin* it is [θ]. The consonant in *she* is [ʃ], in *pleasure* the sound represented in spelling by *s* is [ʒ]. In *law* the initial consonant is [l], in *raw* it is [r]. In *ram*, *ran*, *rang*, the three final consonants are [m], [n], [ŋ]. The initial consonant of *wine* is [w], of *whine* is [ʍ]. The initial consonant of *year* is [j]. The consonant [h] appears in *he*. In earlier stages of English, as still in Scottish, a consonant [χ] was present, like the final consonant of Scotch *loch*. The consonant which appears initially and finally in *judge* is not a simple sound, but a combination of [d] and [ʒ], therefore written [dʒ]. So also in *church*, the consonant represented in spelling by *ch* is a double consonant, consisting of [t] and [ʃ], written [tʃ].

Although this list of sounds that has been given certainly does not exhaust all the sounds that are constantly used in English today or that have been used in the past periods of English, nevertheless it does provide a working basis for further and more minute study of English sounds. The student who has analyzed thoroughly the organic method of formation of these sounds, who knows just how they are made, has at command a foundation knowledge of the phonetic processes of the English language that will carry him a long way. No group of sounds would represent an absolute and original fund of sound material out of which the language was constructed. The language

was not made in that way. There are no fundamental speech sounds, but all speech sounds may be described as accidental, that is, they are always the result of new adaptations to circumstances. The purpose of the study of speech sounds is not therefore to present a final statement of the unconditioned elements of which the speech by its nature is composed. It is rather to open a way to the observation of the processes of the language in its use of sounds and to provide a manner of description sufficiently flexible and expansible to take account of anything that calls for description.

The use of a special set of symbols, a phonetic alphabet, in describing the sounds of the language, raises the whole general question of the relation of the spoken or audible sounds of all language to the written or visual representation of it. In the first place, it should be noted that the letters of the alphabet do not bear any necessary relation to the sounds indicated by them. In English the sound symbolized by the letter *p* might just as well be symbolized by the letter *b*, or the sound of *k* by the symbol for the sound of *s*. It is true that a kind of visible speech has been invented, employed in stenography, in which the symbols supposedly represent the positions of the organs of speech in the formation of sounds. Even in this so-called visible speech, however, a certain amount of conventional symbolizing is necessarily employed. The main use of all alphabets is to enable anyone who sees the letters of the alphabet in words to recall the sounds contained in the words. Any alphabet which will do this satisfactorily is a good alphabet, good not only for practical purposes, but also for scientific purposes. But the English alphabet satisfies only one-half of these conditions.

The English alphabet is good enough for practical purposes. The proof that it is so can be found in the fact that the people who use the language have got along with it successfully for a long time and under varied and exacting circumstances. Whether or not the English method of representing the sounds of the language could be improved is quite another matter. Spelling is a human invention and human inventions do not often attain an absolute perfection. But though the language does get along and has got along with its traditional alphabet and spelling, the scientific student finds the traditional symbols quite inadequate for his purposes. In the natural use of language, the alphabet and spelling are employed to recall the pronunciation of words as wholes. Their functions are very largely suggestive not of individual sounds, but of the group of sounds which constitutes the word. The special study of speech sounds, however, must concern itself not merely with the pronunciation of words, but with separate sounds, segregated and sometimes considered in relation to shadings of sound not provided for in the traditional alphabet. The student of phonetics needs therefore a set of symbols elaborate enough to contain one symbol for each separate sound he wishes to discuss, and so definite that when any symbol is used, there can be no uncertainty concerning the sound intended by the symbol. Such an alphabet would be called a phonetic alphabet. The symbols in it, however, would not correspond by necessity to the sounds of the speech any more than the symbols of the traditional alphabet. It would be a phonetic alphabet merely in the sense that it contained a symbol for each sound and that each symbol always meant its own sound. Any alphabet devised for this

purpose would be a phonetic alphabet, and consistently applied, it would serve all the needs of the student of the sounds of the language. Many such alphabets have been invented, the one used here being the alphabet, with slight modifications, of the International Phonetic Association.

The description of a phonetic alphabet given above, that it contains a symbol for each sound and that each symbol always means its own sound, seems so reasonable that one may wonder why this principle does not determine the character of all alphabets. If alphabets and spelling are devised to recall words, the best method of doing so would surely be one which operated most economically and systematically. But if some sounds are unrepresented in the alphabet and if some symbols have several values, then the alphabet cannot be systematically operated. The representation of the sounds in words in Modern English is especially and notoriously unsystematic. The reasons for this are to be found in the history of English spelling. In Anglo-Saxon the representation of the sounds of the language was as systematic as any practical language is likely to be. Anglo-Saxon spelling was very satisfactorily phonetic, and so also to a very considerable extent was Middle English spelling. But already in the Middle English period, one begins to note a widening gap between spelling and pronunciation, caused by the fact that though the sounds contained in a word changed, the word nevertheless retained its older visual form. In the Middle and early Modern English periods, words tended to take on fixed visual forms, and no matter what happened to a word on the phonetic side, on the spelling side it remained as it had been. The language ceased to be phonetic in the sense that the symbols representing the sounds were

unequivocally and systematically used. The symbols indeed to a large extent came to bear no relation to the sounds, but were merely clues for the eye by which words were recognized. Thus the conventional spelling of a word like *through* came to have very little phonetic value, and such inconsistencies as *right, rite, write, wright* appeared in the language.

The problem of spelling reform is essentially the same as the problem of a phonetic alphabet. But there is this difference, that in spelling reform the reformer is endeavoring to secure the practical acceptance and general employment of some more systematic and orderly method of representing the sounds of the language than the traditional alphabet, whereas the student of phonetics uses his phonetic alphabet only as a practical convenience in enabling him to discuss the materials of his subject intelligibly and easily.

The history of the letters of the alphabet is a subject which properly finds a place in a general consideration of the sounds of the language. The letters of the English alphabet are directly of Latin origin, and in all its recorded stages, the English language has been customarily written in the Roman alphabet. This alphabet was brought to the Anglo-Saxons by the Roman missionaries in the latter part of the sixth century. Previously it had been transmitted to the Celtic branch of the Christian church in Ireland, and through Celtic missionaries in England this Celtic form of the Roman alphabet also became familiar to the Anglo-Saxons. Styles of writing and of printing in later periods brought about certain modifications of the Anglo-Saxon alphabet as it was taken over from the Romans, but from the beginning to the present day the

basis of the visual form of the English language has been the Roman alphabet. The Teutonic peoples had an alphabet of their own which the Anglo-Saxons might have used. This was an alphabet composed of runes. But the disappearance of the runic alphabet not only among the Anglo-Saxons but also among all the other Teutonic peoples is to be explained by the extraordinary assimilating power of medieval Latin learning and executive organization. The Anglo-Saxons indeed retained a few symbols from the older runic alphabet, for example [ð] and [þ], for the sound now written *th*, but no trace of runic writing remains in Modern English. Though it would have been possible to write books in runic symbols, runic monuments that survive are restricted to comparatively short passages and inscriptions.

The two aspects of the study of English sounds that have so far been considered are, first, the recognition of sounds and their manner of formation, and second, the method of visual representation of sounds, both that of the traditional alphabet and of the artificial phonetic alphabet. There remains still the very important subject of the historical study of English sounds.

When one speaks of the history of English sounds, it is necessary to remember that sounds have had no separate existence, with a detachable history of their own. The sounds of the language have occurred only in words, and, in natural speech, words occur only in sentences. Therefore, sounds really exist only in the connected discourse of the language, and it is there that the historical development of them takes place. The history of English sounds is the history of the current forms of the spoken language.

But though English sounds have no separate existence in the natural use of the language, the historian very readily can detach them for special observation and study. For the peculiar thing about speech sounds is that the same sounds recur again and again in different words. The whole of the English language is constructed out of about forty different type sounds. And another most remarkable fact is that although the people who speak the language are at no time consciously aware of the separate sounds of the language when they are speaking it, nevertheless the sounds maintain a kind of identity, and when a particular sound changes in one word, the same sound will change in the same way in all other words, with rare exceptions occasioned by special circumstances which either prevent change or cause special changes. These regular changes in the sounds of speech are known as sound laws. They are not laws in the sense that they are the fulfillment of any decree or inner necessity, but they are empirical laws, that is, they are the result of natural experience, and the causes which produce them are the natural physiological and psychological processes of mankind in the use of speech. Thus we observe that Modern English *stone* [stoːn] is Middle English *ston* [stɔːn], and Anglo-Saxon *stan* [staːn], and when we observe that many other words with Anglo-Saxon [aː] reveal corresponding changes, we arrive at the law that Anglo-Saxon [aː] became Middle English [ɔː], which in turn became Modern English [oː]. What was the reason for this change? Why did not Anglo-Saxon [aː] remain as it was? But in most instances it is much easier to describe the facts of sound change than it is to give the reasons for the change. The facts cannot often remain in doubt, for they are actually

on record in the forms of the language, but the forces which have produced the facts must be sought for indirectly and by inference. The evidence proving the cause of a phonetic change must always be circumstantial, and though in some instances the evidence cannot be in doubt, as for example, in assimilations like the final voiced consonant of *stopped* becoming voiceless [t] through the influence of a preceding voiceless consonant [p], yet in others a convincing or even plausible explanation may be very hard to find. The causes of variation and change even in present speech, which is directly under our observation, are often difficult to discover, and for the sounds of past time, the evidence naturally is both less extensive and less certain. No reason, except that they are in the habit of doing so, can be given for the fact that some people say [ru:f], [ru:t], [su:t] and [hɑ:f], [lɑ:f], [glɑ:s] for *roof, root, soot* and *half, laugh, glass,* whereas others say [rʊf], [rʊt] [sʊt] and [hæf], [læf], [glæs]. A reason and a cause there must have been, for it is not conceivable that any change would take place in language without some occasion for it. But the historical student will not infrequently find that the motive forces behind a sound change escape him, even when the change appears obviously and in large groups of words. When this happens the sound law must be accepted as given by observation and experience, and the search for the causes that have produced the law must be continued further.

If the historical study of sounds is the study of the spoken word in the several stages of the language, the question naturally arises whether it is really possible to bring to life again the actual sounds of the English language of other days, and if so, what is the process by

which this resurrection is achieved. Is it possible to pronounce the language of Shakspere or of Chaucer in such a way that if Shakspere or Chaucer could hear us they would recognize our reproduction as their own language? Unfortunately the historical student's attempt at reproduction cannot be submitted to any such decisive test, but nevertheless one may venture to say that the person who makes intelligent use of all the evidence now available for pronouncing the language of Shakspere or the language of Chaucer would pronounce a language not widely different from the actual spoken words of Shakspere or Chaucer. Perhaps Shakspere or Chaucer would not acknowledge the historical student's reproduction as precisely their own speech. They would probably feel that there was something strange about it, that it was English of not quite the same dialect as their own, but they would not cast it from them as something altogether alien and unintelligible.

The evidence which makes it thus possible to reconstruct the speech of past times must be collected from a variety of sources. First and most important of all comes the evidence of spelling, especially in the earlier periods. In the Anglo-Saxon and Middle English periods spelling had not yet become as completely fixed and conventionalized as it is now in Modern English. Different persons of cultivation and education might spell the same words in different ways if they pronounced them differently. Spelling was then a closer echo of the sounds of words than it is now in English when a word must be spelled in the established way, no matter how it is pronounced. Yet even in Modern English, spellings are not altogether irrational and unintelligible. There are many curious

anomalies in Modern English spelling, but nevertheless a close student of modern spellings would be enabled to make many useful deductions as to the pronunciation of the sounds of the language, even if he had never heard a word of it spoken. And when to Modern English spellings, a succession of spellings covering a period of a thousand years is added, the conclusions to be drawn from spellings become both more numerous and more definitely verifiable.

In the Modern English period deviations from the conventional spelling are particularly important as clues to pronunciation. For if a person spells the word *get* as *git* or the word *deaf* as *deef*, these spellings leave us in no doubt as to the pronunciations intended. The person who spells in this fashion, spells as he speaks, not as he remembers from having learned the prescribed and proper spellings. Nowadays such spellings as *git* and *deef* would be called illiterate, and the inferences to be drawn from them with respect to pronunciation could be applied only to persons who might be expected to spell incorrectly. But correct spelling has been a common possession, even of the upper classes of the English people, for but a comparatively short time. A hundred years ago many well bred and cultivated persons, especially ladies, were irregular and uncertain in their spellings. The spellings of such persons therefore are significant for the pronunciation of the language as it passed current among speakers who cannot be grouped with the illiterate and the ignorant. The historical evidence plainly shows that many pronunciations were formerly current among good speakers, for example [di:f] for *deaf* and [gɪt] for *get*, that now would be regarded as characteristic of the speech of per-

sons not acquainted with the best social customs of the language.

The rimes of the poets are likewise of great assistance in enabling the student to make reasonable inferences with respect to the pronunciation of words in past times. Poets have not always been infallible rimesters, and the evidence of rimes must therefore be cautiously treated. But the rimes of one poet can be checked by the rimes of another poet, and when the student finds agreement in riming among a group of poets of the same period, it is a fairly safe inference that the sounds represented by these common rimes were the actual sounds of the speech of the time. Such evidence, however, cannot be treated as final. It can be regarded only as one bit more of circumstantial evidence to be added to the evidence of spelling and anything else available as a foundation upon which to build an inference. In drawing conclusions from the rimes of poets, it is always necessary to proceed circumspectly and with full regard for the changes which may have taken place in the pronunciation of the language. For example, Milton in *Il Penseroso* rimes *mirth* and *hearth*, but the inference to be drawn from this is not that Milton pronounced *hearth* in a way to make it rime with *mirth* as this latter word is now pronounced. Undoubtedly *mirth* and *hearth* made a good rime in Milton's pronunciation, but it is possible that both words were pronounced differently by him from the way they would be pronounced by us. And indeed it is not only possible but almost certain that Milton pronounced *mirth* as [mɛrθ] and *hearth* as [hɛrθ].

Grammars, guides to pronunciation, dictionaries, and similar works provide a great deal of information for the

historical student. Treatises of this kind were not written in the Anglo-Saxon and the Middle English periods, but for the last three hundred years these critical sources of information are abundant. Pronouncing dictionaries, however, are of comparatively recent origin. Dr. Johnson's famous dictionary, published in 1755, did not indicate the pronunciation of words, and Dr. Johnson was of the opinion that it was impracticable to do so. In the latter part of the century, in the dictionaries of Perry, (1775), Sheridan (1780), and Walker (1791) the custom of indicating pronunciations in dictionaries established itself, and ever since that time, the description of pronunciation has been considered an essential part of the task of putting together the materials for a dictionary.

From what has been said it will be seen that the assembling and the judging of the evidence for a particular characteristic of pronunciation is not a work to be undertaken lightly or carelessly. Only the person who knows the evidence and who is familiar with the phonetic processes of the language is competent to discuss questions of pronunciation authoritatively. In other words, the historical treatment of English pronunciation calls for a technical method and a body of technical information which only the person professionally well equipped can possess. The results also of the historical study of pronunciation can be adjudged as right or wrong, reasonable or unreasonable, only by the person who knows the value of the evidence. To the inexperienced observer it may seem that the historical student often asks the layman to take a great deal on faith, to accept as phonetically the same, words that look too widely different. Thus the Modern English word *lord* does not look much like Anglo-Saxon

hlāford, or Modern English *lady* like Anglo-Saxon *hlǣfdige*. But a knowledge of the phonetic processes involved in the transition of *hlāford* into *lord* and *hlǣfdige* into *lady* makes the dissimilarity in these words seem less great, and such knowledge takes the relationship between the words in the two pairs out of the realm of faith and places it on the foundation of demonstrable historical fact.

The historical changes in English pronunciation may be divided into two large classes, according to a distinction already mentioned, those in which the occasioning circumstances were immediate and more or less readily discoverable, and those in which they were remote and often difficult to ascertain. The sound changes of the first class are of various kinds. For example, the presence or the absence of accent is of the greatest importance in the consideration of English sounds. In general, unaccented vowels have tended to become obscured in quality and even to disappear. But the shadings between the extremes of accented and unaccented have also been important. Thus Anglo-Saxon *wīs* [wiːs] as an accented word, gives Modern English *wise*, and Anglo-Saxon *dōm* [doːm] as an accented word gives Modern English *doom*, but when these two words are combined in the compound *wisdom*, the result is different, neither element of the compound receiving as much stress as each element would receive as an independent word. So also the words *too* and *to* of Modern English are historically the same word, and as they are thus presented in detachment from any context, they might also seem to be pronounced the same. In actual speech, however, *too* is pronounced [tuː] and *to* is pronounced [tə], the word *too* bearing a relatively heavy accent and *to* a relatively light accent.

1. Accent
2. Influence of neighboring sounds.
3. Phonetic nature of sounds

Another kind of sound change the cause of which is readily ascertainable is that which takes place under the influence of neighboring sounds. For example, the singular of *wife* ends in the voiceless consonant [f], but in the plural *wives* this consonant becomes [v]. The reason for this change is that in earlier stages of the language, in Middle English for example, when the singular of *wife* became a plural, the addition of an inflectional vowel ending placed the consonant *f* in intervocalic position, and as a result of this position, the consonant changed from a voiceless to a voiced sound, to agree with its surroundings. Thus the Middle English forms of this word would be *wif* [wi:f] and *wifes, wives* [wi:vəs]. But another change under the influence of neighboring sounds likewise took place in this word. For when the inflectional vowel of the Middle English plural of *wife* disappeared in Modern English, as all inflectional vowels did disappear, then the final consonant of the Middle English word, which was voiceless [s], was brought into juxtaposition to the intervocalic consonant which had become voiced [v], and was assimilated to it in kind, also becoming voiced [z].

Other sound changes explainable from the immediate circumstances are those that result from the phonetic nature of the sounds in question. For example, the words *enough, tough* contain a final [f], though the spelling *gh* is a survival from a period when this final sound was different. In Anglo-Saxon these words were *genōh* and *tōh*, pronounced [jə'no:χ] and [to:χ]. But this consonant [χ] no longer occurs in English speech, though it survives in Scotch in words like *loch*. In some words the consonant disappeared, leaving no sound at all to represent it, as in *though* or in the proper name *Goodenough*, but in others,

as in *enough, tough, rough,* the older sound was simply replaced by a sound somewhat like it. Strictly speaking the sound [f] is not greatly like the sound [χ], but they are about as much alike as [f] and [θ], and it is a matter of common observation that children frequently substitute [f] for [θ] in words like *think, anything,* etc. In the pronunciation of *enough, tough, rough,* a similar process has become standardized in the language.

Another illustration is provided by the word *against.* In Anglo-Saxon this word had no final [t], its spelling form being *ongēanes,* with the stress on the second syllable. The first syllable, *on-,* being an unstressed prefix, weakened to *a-,* and the final consonant of the present pronunciation of the word was developed in the same way as when a final [t] is now often added to words like *once, twice,* because it seems easy and natural to add [t] after a final [s]. In the same way a final [d] was sometimes added after [n]. This is familiar in the uncultivated pronunciation *drownd* for *drown,* but standard English *sound,* from French *soun,* Latin *sonus,* received its final *d* in the same way.

The word *apron* in Modern English is by origin closely related to the words *napery, napkin,* being derived from French *naperon.* But the English word now begins with a vowel because the original initial [n] has been carried over to the article which commonly preceded it, *a napron* thus becoming *an apron.* In the same way, *a nadder, a nauger* have become *an adder, an auger.* The reverse process is illustrated by the Modern English *nickname,* originally *an eke-name,* that is, an additional name, but the [n] of the article has been transferred to the body of the word. So also Modern English *newt* comes from Anglo-Saxon *efete,* with an initial [n] acquired from a preceding

indefinite article. Anglo-Saxon *efete* survives not only in *newt*, but also in a second form, used by Browning in "Caliban upon Setebos" in the phrase "small eft-things," little creatures that live in "the pit's much mire."

The illustrations of sound changes in English words that have been given have not been chosen for their surpassing importance in explaining the changes in large numbers of English words. Each one indeed explains only a comparatively small number of words. But they have been presented to illustrate a way in which a great many of the changes in English sounds may be accounted for. The particular circumstances which determine changes vary widely and each group of similar changes must naturally have its own explaining cause. But the important point is that in looking for causes, one must exhaust all the immediate or near possibilities before one is justified in looking for a remote cause. In the main the processes of sound change are not eccentric or mysterious. They are the very natural result of the workings of the mind in its dealings with the materials of which speech is composed, that is, with the sounds of the human voice. A great many English sound changes can be explained on the basis of the obvious physics of speech, and the endeavor should always be to explain as many sound changes as possible in this way.

The remote and more general explanations of the causes of sound change must always be treated with caution. It is impossible to bring a remote explanation under direct observation, and an ingenious and plausible theory unsupported by immediate evidence must not be too freely accepted. A common explanation offered for sound change, for example, is that they are the result of 'ease

of utterance,' of 'economy of effort.' The implication of this theory is that speech is a physically burdensome effort and that the general human tendency is to ease up on the burden of the effort by modifying in the direction of greater ease the elements of which the speech is composed. As a general psychological principle, however, this theory is very dubious. It would be as easy to argue that speech is not a burdensome effort but a pleasure. Perhaps it corresponds to the joyful singing of the birds. And certainly whenever there is any question of a choice between the physical effort of producing speech and the expressing of a desire, meaning, or intention by the use of speech, the physical effort counts as nothing. Men will undergo any amount of anguish only to bring into intelligible form the desires of their hearts and the thoughts of their minds. As a comprehensive explanation of the change in speech sounds, the theory of economy of effort is very unsatisfactory. The truth is that any forms of speech that one is familiar with and has frequently produced seem easy and economical compared with less familiar or unknown sounds. Ease and difficulty in speech are very largely relative matters. Modern English *asked* may seem easy to persons familiar with the word, but the three consonants [skt] coming together are certainly not an easy combination, and Anglo-Saxon *āscode* ['ɑ̄skode], though longer, seems easier to pronounce. The only way to test whether one pronunciation is easier than another would be to apply some method of measuring the physical effort involved. Even then, after one had proved that one sound was easier than the other, it would still be necessary to prove that the difference in ease was the explaining cause of change in a sound, for greater ease

of utterance might very well be an accidental consequence.

With the necessary qualifications and reservations, however, it is probable that ease of utterance remains a principle of some importance in explaining the changes in English sounds. In teaching their children how to speak, parents often simplify the sounds of the language, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that some of these infantile simplifications have ultimately passed on and established themselves in adult speech. The disappearance of the Anglo-Saxon sound [χ] from the language may perhaps be explained in this way. The past tense of the verb *to seek* in Anglo-Saxon was *sohte*, pronounced [so:χte]. The consonantal combination [χt] is certainly not so easy as the simple consonant [t], and perhaps one might go so far as to say that the sound [χ], merely as a sound, is difficult. Other difficult combinations of Anglo-Saxon have likewise been simplified in later English. Thus the Modern English words *neck*, *ring*, and *lot* appear in Anglo-Saxon in the spellings *hnecca*, *hring* and *hlot*, pronounced [hnɛkɑ], [hrɪŋ], and [hlɔt]. It is not an unreasonable inference that the comparative ease of [n], [r] and [l] caused the loss of the sound [h] that preceded these sounds in Anglo-Saxon. One of the remarkable developments of the English language has been the complete loss of the consonant [r] before other consonants and in the final position after vowels in the speech of certain very large groups of users of the language. Has this sound disappeared because of the difficulty of pronouncing it in these positions? The theory is not improbable, but no convincing proof of the truth of it can be given. This is indeed the defect always of remote general explanations of this kind. They may

seem reasonable and plausible enough, but the missing links in the evidence make a complete demonstration impossible.

That certain groups of speakers of English have characteristic general habits in speech different from other groups is a known fact easily verifiable by observation. Thus some speakers utter their words in a crisp, clipped manner, while others speak slowly and drawlingly. Some speakers pronounce their sounds relatively far forward on the organs of speech. They speak mainly from the front of the mouth and the lips, whereas others have a deep-seated voice that seems to find a full and free passage from the inner regions of the throat to the outer world. Differing customs of this kind when diffused through groups of speakers might very well result in general differences of pronunciation. Perhaps some general cause like this is the explanation of the most striking set of sound changes in the whole history of the English language. These changes took place in the transition of the long accented vowels from Anglo-Saxon, and more particularly from Middle English to Modern English. The change may be described in general as a process of fronting and rounding of vowel sounds. Thus Anglo-Saxon *a* [aː] became Middle English *o*[ɔː] and Modern English *o*[oː]. Anglo-Saxon *æ* [æː] became Middle English *e* [ɛː], early Modern English *e* [eː] and Modern English *e, ee, ea* [iː]. Anglo-Saxon *e* [eː] remained unchanged in Middle English and became *e* [iː] in Modern English. Anglo-Saxon *o* [oː] also remained unchanged in Middle English and became *o, oo* [uː] in Modern English. Now all these changes seem to have moved in the same general direction and a plausible inference would be that they have had the same

determining cause. Just what this cause was, however, must be a matter only for plausible conjecture. Perhaps in the history of the language a tendency was present, may indeed still be present, to pronounce the sounds of the language further forward and with more lip action than in the oldest periods. The theory at any rate would fit the changes in the history of the English long accented vowels that have been mentioned. The two remaining long vowels of Anglo-Saxon [iː] and [uː], do not fit precisely into the theory, but a reason for this may be found. For [iː] is already as far forward and [uː] is already as fully rounded as any English sounds could well be. They therefore do not follow the general tendency, but instead break into diphthongal sounds, Anglo-Saxon [iː] becoming Modern English [aɪ], and Anglo-Saxon [uː] becoming Modern English [aʊ]. So we have Anglo-Saxon *ridan* [riːdɑn] becoming Modern English *ride* [raɪd], and Anglo-Saxon *hus* [huːs] becoming Modern English *house* [haʊs]. Perhaps this tendency to diphthongize the high and the front long vowels is still active in the language. In English today the vowels historically designated as [eː], [iː], and [oː] show a strong tendency to take on diphthongal forms. Thus the vowel in a word like *may* is not simply [eː]. Its character is more nearly represented by [eɪ] or [ɛɪ]. So also the vowel of *see* is not simply [iː], but something like [iɪ], and the vowel of *know* is not simply [oː], but a bewildering variety of diphthongal sounds, [oʊ], [ɔʊ], [ʌʊ] and still others. These developments are not improbably caused by certain general habits, certain styles of enunciation, one may say, in the speech today. To point out the exact nature of these general habits calls for all the knowledge and judgment the expert phonetician

possesses. Even when he has done his best, however, not a few of the causes of the changes in English sounds must remain matters for speculation, none the less interesting, however, because in the end judgment must remain more or less suspended.

XXII

THE BEST PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is a matter of such insistent and daily concern that it calls for separate consideration. Nobody is satisfied with anything except the best pronunciation, and pronunciations are often eagerly debated by speakers who are not at all troubled over questions of grammar or vocabulary. For this there are good reasons, one being that pronunciation is much more inclusive as a debatable activity in language than grammar or vocabulary. The number of situations in which questions of grammar may arise is comparatively small, and the number of words which are distinctive for particular uses or groups is never large. But pronunciation is a matter which affects every word in the language and every time it is spoken. It is therefore the most revealing of all the aspects of language. In the *Autocrat,* Holmes asserts that the pronunciation of a single word may tell you all you want to know about the origins and possibilities of a person. Perhaps Holmes makes pronunciation bear too heavy a burden of meaning, yet it is nevertheless true that pronunciation is often more significant than any other personal habit in determining one's likes and dislikes, approvals and disapprovals.

Though everybody is eager to possess the best pronunciation, wide divergence of opinion exists as to what constitutes the best pronunciation. Some of the aspects of this question have already been discussed in the consideration of dialects and of the levels of speech. The

pronunciation of general colloquial speech is in some respects different from that of formal speech. These differences, however, are determined by the special conditions of the latter type of speech and are not really pertinent to the discussion of the general questions of pronunciation. Obviously the normal pronunciation of those interested in norms must be one that is current on the level of general cultivated society, and any variations must be estimated by looking at them from the angle of the pronunciation of cultivated conversation. The matter limits itself, therefore, to the discovery of what should be regarded as the best pronunciation for cultivated social intercourse through the forms of spoken language.

One defense of certain preferred pronunciations often made is that the sounds contained in them, regarded merely as sounds, are more pleasing, more beautiful than the sounds in the rejected pronunciations. This is equivalent to saying that some sounds of English speech are better than others because of their inherent power to please. That all sounds in nature are equally pleasing perhaps no one would maintain. The melody of a babbling brook charms the ear more than the rattling of an empty can. But neither the music of the brook nor the noise of the can are sounds of English speech, and for the moment these are the only sounds under consideration. Yet even among English sounds regarded merely as sounds, some might conceivably be defended as more agreeable to the ear, and on this ground, better as the structural material of language. In the course of its history, the English language has unquestionably got rid of certain sounds, as for example the final consonant in the Scotch pronunciation of *loch*, which by the standards

of present speech at least, seem harsh and unlovely sounds. So one might argue, though with difficulty prove, that the sound of *z* in *size* is less agreeable as a sound than the sound of *o* in *rose*, or the sound of *th* in *thin* than the sound of *l* in *tall*. It is extremely doubtful, however, if any such preferences exist genuinely and strongly enough to be appreciable. Only a very subtle æsthetic of sounds would be capable of discriminating among such refined choices. Association of meaning always plays such an important part in the feeling one thinks one may have for a sound that æsthetic judgments on sounds themselves must be made only with extreme caution. Would the sound of *s* in *rose*, which is the same as the sound of *z* in *size*, be as disagreeable as the same sound when it appears in *toes*, *nose*, and other unpoetic words?

Yet even if those who speak the English language felt an incontestable preference for one speech sound as against another, for *o* as contrasted with *z*, for *l* as against *th*, such a preference could have no significant bearing on the use of the language unless the two sounds were so nearly alike that they might be employed interchangeably in the words in which they occurred. No matter how violent one's preference for *o* might be as contrasted with the sound of *z*, one could not pronounce the word *rose* without using the hateful sound. Of course one might altogether avoid using words containing the sound *z*, but only at the cost of extraordinary inconvenience. The English language contains only about forty clearly distinguishable sounds, and a speaker who tried to get along without any one of these sounds would soon discover that they are all put to very constant and inescapable uses. Sometimes poets may write a line or two in which par-

ticular sounds are selected and made significant, as in Tennyson's "The murmur of bees in immemorial elms," or Swinburne's "lisp of leaves and ripple of rain" with their groupings of *m*, *l*, *r*, and *z* sounds. But such lines are sound pictures, possible for brief moments, and even in poetry very exceptional. In its general uses the language pays no heed to the different qualities of the sounds it employs from the point of view of their intrinsic values. Any sound may occur in any kind of word, in the ugliest as well as the most beautiful, in the simplest as well as the most subtle.

The question of choice between two sounds is of practical importance in language only when the possibility of employing two different sounds in the same word is present. The point now under consideration is whether this choice can be determined by the values of the sounds considered merely as sounds, whether the one pronunciation is thus inherently good or better and the other inherently bad or less good. For illustration, two sets of sounds may be chosen which are often debated and which occur in a large number of English words pronounced differently by different speakers. The sounds of the one set are the familiar vowels that occur in *hat* and in *calm*, of the other the two vowel sounds that occur in *mute* and in *moot*. All four of these sounds occur in dozens of English words concerning which no questions of pronunciation are ever raised. The possibility of choice indeed is present only in very limited groups. Thus in one of these groups one may pronounce the vowel of *half*, *path*, *glass* and of other words either with the sound of the vowel of *hat* or of *calm*. Or we may pronounce the vowel of *duty*, *tube*, and other similar words, either with the vowel of *mute* or the vowel

of *moot*. Can the question of choice be determined in groups of words like these on the basis of the inherent excellence of one speech sound as contrasted with another? In these two groups the question specifically is whether the pronunciation of *half* with the vowel of *calm* is inherently better than with the vowel of *hat*, of *tube* with the vowel of *mute* than with the vowel of *moot*, since in present use the first pronunciation in each instance is ordinarily preferred to the second when a choice is to be made. Now nothing is more certain than that the preferred pronunciation of words like *half* and *tube* did not originate under æsthetic impulses. Moreover, it is a matter of familiar knowledge to the historical student of language that now one and now the other of the pronunciations in the past has been exalted and cultivated. In the eighteenth century the vowel of *calm* in *half*, or for that matter in *calm* itself, was regarded as rustic and provincial in the judgment of most of the elegant arbiters of taste in pronunciation of the time. Our modern Italian *a* was not held in good repute in the eighteenth century in any words. And Noah Webster devoted page after page of argument to prove that the proper sound of the vowel in *tube*, *duty*, and other like words should not be the sound of *u* in *use*, that the words should not be pronounced *teoob* or *deooty*, as he wrote them to indicate the long *u* sound, but with a sound approximately that of *boot*, that is, with the sound which today the purist would ordinarily reprehend in these words, and one which, it need scarcely be said, no longer appears in the revisions of Webster's dictionary. It is true that Webster made some subtle refinement between the vowel of *boot* and the one that he recommended in *duty*, so subtle, how-

ever, that in spite of all his endeavor Webster did not succeed in making the distinction clear. Special advocates in language are much inclined to hear subtleties in pronunciation which they are unable to make others hear, the reason being usually that the distinctions have no existence among the realities of English speech. But if the two pronunciations of *half* and of *tube* have both been at different times and by different persons praised and recommended as admirable pronunciations, it does not seem that there could be anything inherent in the quality of the vowel sounds in question to sway judgment either in the one direction or the other.

The objection may be made, however, that this argument is purely historical, that the taste of other times may have been different, and that since a choice is open now between the two pronunciations of *half* and *tube*, the modern speaker can only follow his own judgment and use the best vowel sound in each, the vowel of *calm* in *half* and of *use* in *tube*. Yet a counter objection immediately suggests itself in the fact that both the approved and the reprehended pronunciation are still current today, and both current in what one must call cultivated conversation. If then the advocate of a preferred pronunciation retorts that he cannot be held responsible for anything except his own æsthetic judgments, that however anybody else may feel about them, he knows that for himself the vowels of *calm* and of *use* are more beautiful in *half* and *tube* than the vowels of *hat* and *boot*, we reach the point where further discussion becomes impossible. Æsthetic judgments of this kind are not debatable, and since this is the position to which argument always comes when choice between two possible pronunciations is to be determined on the basis

of the inherent excellence of the one as compared with the other, it follows that these judgments are of very little value as intelligible tests of excellence in pronunciation. In the lack of any convincing evidence to the contrary, we are compelled to assume that when a speaker selects one of two current pronunciations on the ground of its intrinsic beauty, he is the victim of self-deception, that in reality he is not choosing between a beautiful and a less beautiful sound, but merely between an acceptable and a less acceptable social habit which he mistakenly interprets as based upon a difference in the power to please in the sounds themselves.

Another dubious test of excellence in pronunciation which removes it from among the variabilities of social custom and which provides for it a relatively fixed standard of values is that which makes it dependent upon the visual, that is, the written and printed forms of the language. This is the doctrine which was expressed unequivocally by Dr. Johnson when he declared that the best pronunciation is that which stands closest to the spelling. Stated thus baldly, this may seem like an absurd theory, yet manifestly a good deal may be said in defense of it. Certainly there is no virtue in keeping spelling and pronunciation far apart. One of the necessary conditions of the practical intelligibility of language is that they shall be approximately close together, unless indeed the written and the spoken language are to be two quite separate things, two languages, the one not necessarily at the command of the person who knows the other. Something like this has happened in China, where the literary language has a life of its own which bears very little relation to the life of the spoken language. In English, however,

and especially within the past two hundred years, the effort has been to reduce the distance between the written and the spoken language. This has been the intent of all movements for spelling reform and of a great deal of the effort expended on the phonetic study of the language.

The important question, however, is not whether spelling and pronunciation should closely correspond, but how they may be made to correspond. Should spelling determine pronunciation, and is a pronunciation which accords with the spelling by that fact a better pronunciation than one that does not? If this were so, then a pronunciation of *monk* to rime with *honk* would be better than one to rime with *trunk*, or *victuals* as though written *vikchuals* than as though written *vittles*. These are extreme examples and only a violent theorist would defend such spelling pronunciations. The principle nevertheless is often accepted by persons who may hesitate to carry it to its final applications, or who hold to it as an ideal, cherished even when it is not put extensively into practice. One may fairly ask, therefore, whether the principle of adapting pronunciation to spelling moderately applied may not be legitimate. As examples words like *certain*, *curtain*, *fountain*, *mountain* will serve, ordinarily in cultivated conversation pronounced in the second syllable with no vowel, or with a very feeble vowel after *t*, as though written *certn*, *curtn*, *fountn*, *mountn*. But if the traditional spelling in these words were given its full value, these words would be pronounced *certane*, *curtane*, *fountane*, *mountane*. Ought they to be so pronounced and is this the best pronunciation? That they are not customarily so pronounced in cultivated conversation is proved by the simple method of direct observation. But

the advocate of *certane, curtane, fountane, mountane* may urge that they are still the best pronunciations even though we do not regularly use them — like the best bib and tucker which remains the best although it is not worn every day. Best in this sense therefore would not mean that which is immediately best but that towards which one aspires. One starts out moderately perhaps with *certane, curtane, fountane, mountane,* but having achieved this pronunciation, one then presumably moves on to other worlds to conquer, even to the extent perhaps of making *monk* rime with *honk,* or pronouncing *victuals* as *vikchuals.* Manifestly there would be no end to the possible conquests of this kind in the English language. In short the principle of making English pronunciation conform to traditional English spelling, whether applied moderately or rigorously, immediately produces a kind of speech so unreal, so unlike any normal cultivated speech, that it is at once felt to be an absurdity — except by speakers who value theory above reality. In another place it was pointed out that the literary language of reading and writing is on one level, that of spoken discourse on another level. The style appropriate to one cannot therefore be made determining for the style appropriate to the other. The impulse to make literary use superior to spoken use, that is, to make spelling determine pronunciation, is a half-educated impulse. It is the impulse of the person who recognizes the literary uses of the language as achievements, but who has not yet understood that the spoken language also has a genuine life of its own, and one in which distinction can be attained only by developing it in conformity with its own proper qualities. The conclusion, therefore, to which one must come is that though

it is highly desirable that the rift between spelling and pronunciation should be as small as possible the character of present English spelling renders it impracticable as a consistently applicable test of excellence in pronunciation. If the harmony between spelling and pronunciation is satisfactory, well and good; but if it is not, so much the worse for the spelling. The pronunciation first of all must stand. The further question, whether harmony between spelling and pronunciation may not be secured when it does not exist by changing English spellings to accord with English pronunciations does not concern us here. This is a question for the spelling reformer, who manifestly has always labored to accomplish this result of adapting spelling to pronunciation.

Perhaps the principle that spelling should determine pronunciation may have a very limited value in instances in which two pronunciations are actually in existence, one in accord with normal expectation in spelling, the other anomalous. In such instances it would seem that spelling might be the decisive factor — as the speaker in the House has the deciding voice in a balanced vote. Instances of this kind, however, are of such extreme rarity that the principle cannot often be utilized. The word *clerk* besides its customary pronunciation may also be pronounced as though written *clark*, and *lieutenant* may be pronounced *leftenant*. Both *clark* and *leftenant* are so uncommon in America, however, as scarcely to enter into competition with *clerk* and *lieutenant*. In England, on the contrary, *clark* and *leftenant* are the preferred pronunciations. In these two words, British usage prefers the pronunciation not in accord with the common analogies of spelling, and American usage prefers the ones which are.

But the fact which justifies both the British and the American pronunciations is that each is established in the current cultivated speech of its own community. In England pronunciations based upon spelling and contrary to accepted conversational use are commonly regarded as vulgar — vulgar in the sense of pretentious and ill-informed. They are just as vulgar in America, though perhaps not quite so numerous, since cultivated use in America through analogical leveling has got rid of anomalies in pronunciation more completely than cultivated use in England, with the result that there is less occasion for divergence between cultivated and uncultivated speech in America than in England. This is especially apparent in proper names. In America proper names are ordinarily pronounced as they are spelled and spelled as they are pronounced. In England, however, many traditional pronunciations survive for proper names which seem very remote from the spelling, *Levison* for example pronounced as though written *Lewson*, or *Keswick* as though written *Kezik*. These pronunciations are established by good social custom in England, the only kind of custom which may reasonably be recognized as having authority in regulating the proprieties of speech. Only the theoretical reformer or the person ignorant of this custom would disregard it. The present inquiry, however, is not concerned with theoretically best pronunciations, but with those that are best in the give and take of cultivated speech as it exists today.

The test of excellence in pronunciation not being found in such exterior standards as the inherent values of the sounds of speech or the harmony of pronunciation and spelling, one must be content with something less positive

and absolute. Good and bad pronunciations are determined by opinion, by the judgments which one passes on the customs of speech as they exist in practice. As a general foundation, the principle holds that any pronunciation which occurs in cultivated use is good or standard. This principle is implied in the definition of cultivated use. Whatever is current in cultivated conversation is by that fact accepted use, therefore good and standard. The principle can be rejected only by those critics of speech who would substitute an ideal for a practical standard of excellence, or by precisionists who insist that all cultivated practice must be uniform, a conviction which may appeal to the reformer but not to the speaker who is intent on discovering the character of speech as it exists. For nothing is more apparent than the fact that all speakers of standard English do not pronounce alike. If some cultivated speakers pronounce words like *tube*, *duke*, *news*, with the vowel of *boot* and others with the vowel of *use*, then both pronunciations must be recognized as good standard pronunciations. A single invariable standard for all speakers exists only in dogmatic systems established more or less arbitrarily, and conceived by their inventors as an ideal towards which all should aspire. The value of this ideal of uniformity as entering into the practical applications of speech is discussed more at length in the chapter on the drift toward regularity. The value of dogmatic systems, however, does not call for much discussion. Such systems are usually the inventions of persons who are unwilling or not able to face the facts of language, often teachers of elocution and elegant speech whose claims to distinction lie mainly in having systems of their own.

But though all pronunciations which occur in cultivated speech must be recognized as good or standard pronunciations, this recognition does not altogether dispose of the question of the best pronunciation. For if several pronunciations are possible in any given word, whenever one pronounces this word, one must choose among the possibilities, and naturally one always tries to choose the best. The speaker then arrives at the point, however, which is always reached when the necessity of choice between two divergent social customs arises. The choice must always be made on the basis of the judgment one makes as to the best social custom, and of judgments of this kind there is an almost infinite variety. A few of these judgments may be briefly suggested to indicate the range of possibility. The best pronunciation may be said to be the pronunciation of the most cultivated members of society, of the best speakers. This is a good practical rule, though obviously no consensus of opinion can be expected on the delicate question who are the most cultivated members of society. The rule provides only a sliding scale, though more useful for this reason than any fixed standard could be. Or again some local pronunciation may be elevated to the position of authority as best. Teachers of elocution in America sometimes advertise themselves as teaching Boston pronunciation. This definition of best derives from the ancient tradition of Boston as the seat of American culture, a tradition now more respectable perhaps for its antiquity than for its general acceptability. Other local pronunciations, however, are also cultivated. Virginians for example often prefer their characteristic pronunciations to any other, and elsewhere, even in the North, speakers sometimes cultivate southern pronun-

ciations because they think such pronunciations carry with them the flavor of southern romance and aristocracy. In the same way British English is often chosen as best, somewhat in the same spirit as that which determines English overcoats or trousers or walking-sticks or traveling bags as 'swagger.' Many Americans like to be taken for Londoners. This liking for things English helps to explain why the language of the American stage is so strongly tinged with an English accent. Even in realistic plays depicting simple or rustic American life the actors will often speak in language that might possibly be mistaken for London English but never for the speech of homespun Americans. It has even been suggested by Professor Bliss Perry that the language of the stage be approved as illustrating the best English pronunciation, the only two models he names being, however, an English actor and an English actress who of late years have frequently appeared before American audiences.[1]

The requirements of their calling, to be sure, demand in actors and actresses a disciplined and professional kind of pronunciation, and as such not necessary or even appropriate in general cultivated conversation. But it is apparently less the disciplined character of stage pronunciation than its British character which often impresses American audiences as admirable and worthy to be imitated. In England itself, however, the pronunciation of the stage is not taken as a model. In that country, where respect for social classes still strongly survives, the pronunciation of the gentleman is commonly recommended as the best, the gentleman being conveniently defined as the sort of person who has gone to school at Eton or

[1] *Academy Papers*, p. 115.

Harrow and afterwards to Oxford or to Cambridge. Social classifications of this kind, however, are notoriously subject to readjustment and fluctuation, and the tables were completely turned when a distinguished English woman recently traveling in the United States described the cultivated women in a city in upper New York State as speaking "with the real Yankee drawl, which is one of the most aristocratic accents in the world — since it is charged with noble history, being essentially an echo and an inheritance from the voice of a brave man discomfiting peril and cheering himself by ridiculing it." [1]

Other seekers after the best in pronunciation may reject the various local associations, distinguished or undistinguished, in speech and place above them all a cosmopolitan pronunciation. By this test, the best pronunciation would be one which carries with it the fewest indications of the local origins of the speaker. Manifestly London English or Boston English, or southern English, or any other highly differentiated local type could not be a cosmopolitan pronunciation and at the same time remain true to type. No doubt a great deal can be said in defense of cosmopolitanism, but so also can a great deal be said in defense of the finer intimacy and picturesqueness of localism.[2]

In short, whatever test of the best pronunciation is chosen, the arguments for it will be found to be arguments against some other test that might have been chosen. The best pronunciation in this sense must always be a highly selective pronunciation which can be elevated to

[1] Rebecca West, *Harper's Magazine*, November, 1925, p. 730.

[2] See the discussion by Royce, *Race Questions, Provincialisms and Other American Problems.*

this position often only by an arbitrary exclusion of other possible bests. In the lack of any universal best, in a world of conflicting aspirations, one is driven to an individual choice in the light of as much wisdom and charity as one can bring to bear. Perhaps the conclusion one may come to, and by no means a desperate conclusion, is that the whole search for a supremely best pronunciation is futile, and that after all is said, the best pronunciation is only a good one, that is, any pronunciation which passes current in cultivated conversation. By this standard, the best pronunciation is the speech of the community, however broadly one may define the word community, in which one finds oneself most satisfactorily and happily at home. Other persons in other communities may have different conceptions of the best, but in the end every person must live within the circle of his own experiences, even of his own limitations, must use the speech therefore which most adequately fits into the circle of his experiences.

A moment ago, in speaking of the professional diction of actors and actresses, the question of the value of a disciplined and trained pronunciation was touched upon. The actor, the orator, or any person who addresses a large audience from a platform undoubtedly must have a technique of his own that can be developed and mastered only by assiduous application. Does a similar necessity rest upon every person, even in the more intimate associations of cultivated conversation, or should speech on this level be left to take care of itself? In effect this is the old question of nature and nurture, and we need not dwell again upon the fact that no person has language, English or any other language, as a direct gift of nature. The child is disciplined in the formation of the sounds of speech

from his earliest speaking moments, partly self-disciplined through the impulse to imitate, partly through the definite direction he receives from his parents. Normally this discipline is continued until the child learns to recognize the sounds of English speech and to produce them in their proper places. Sometimes, however, the discipline is remitted too soon, and the child then carries over to his adult years some of his childish imperfections, lisping for example, or a tendency to confuse the sound of *tl* with *kl*, causing him to say something like *brickle* for *brittle*, or of *th* and *f*, resulting in *fing* for *thing*, or of *s* and *sh*, producing a mushy kind of pronunciation, *yesh* for *yes*, *thish* for *this*, not infrequent even among educated adults. That these defects, and others of a more pathological nature, like stuttering and stammering, should be corrected by discipline, as most of them can be, goes without saying. The main question at present, however, is not whether manifest defects should be corrected by training, but whether positive virtues, not merely a normal but a super-normal, a best pronunciation should be inculcated in the same way. This question can be answered most readily by drawing a parallel between speech and certain other aspects of personal deportment — the carriage of the body for example. If left to themselves children and others may carry themselves well, easily and unconsciously. Such persons are said to have a natural grace, the best kind, possibly, that anyone could have. Yet such persons seem to be unfortunately the exceptions, not the rule. Every parent knows how insistently children must be directed to sit straight, not to shuffle, shamble, and slouch. It has been said that the final test of good breeding is the ability to walk gracefully

across a floor before the eyes of an assemblage. A supremely unconscious person might do this, or a supremely self-conscious person, that is, one who by training has acquired complete control of the motions of the body. So also in speech, a well-bred, natural undisciplined pronunciation may be the gift of the fortunate few, but ordinarily, and in whatever associations one's type of speech is formed, a certain amount of training is necessary to secure that certainty and fineness of control in speech which distinguishes the speech of the cultivated person from that of the boor. Just when this training should stop is a matter to be determined by observation of the subtle proprieties of cultivated speech. Certainly it should stop before it produces an impression of professionalism. Carrying the body well for the average person does not mean carrying it with a military carriage. So also training in pronunciation and the use of the voice should stop before it turns cultivated conversational speech into an elocutionary, or theatrical, or any other kind of professional diction. The highly trained manner of speaking which is so highly trained that it calls attention to itself is out of place on the plane of colloquial use. It may arouse admiration, but admiration is a poor substitute for the sense of intimate sympathy which a merely adequate use of speech may enable two speakers to attain. Good taste demands that speech shall be as unobtrusive as dress and as any other form of social conduct. To find the proper balance between carelessness and uncouthness in speech, on the one hand, and a finical precision or florid amplitude on the other is not always easy. It can be found only when the true character of cultivated speech is kept in mind as neither a self-determining natural

growth nor a fine art, with a technique like that of singing or acting, to be cultivated as an end in itself, but rather as a social convention of many adaptations, all the demands of which are satisfied when each fits its own circumstances. A single best pronunciation is therefore not to be expected, but many bests, conversation being always at its best when human minds are brought into intelligible and kindly relations to each other, "without heat and without vulgarity," through the forms of human speech.

XXIII

THE RELATIONSHIPS OF ENGLISH

The confusion of tongues among the races of men is one of the wonders of the world. Where did all these languages come from? Where does English belong among them? And how many altogether are there of them? But before this third question can be answered, or an attempt made to answer it, some definition of what is meant by the term *a language* must be made. By any method of counting, the number of languages in the world will be large, but just how large will depend upon the strictness with which it is determined that this or the other form of speech shall be regarded as a language by itself.

One of the most illuminating results of the modern scientific study of language, carried on by the methods of comparative grammar, has been the division of the languages of the world into groups or families. Those languages which are different enough to count as separate languages, but at the same time are sufficiently alike to justify the student in holding them together as probably derived from the same source, are regarded as constituting a family group or a language stock. Of these language stocks some have been more completely studied and described than others, and quite naturally in European scholarship the language stocks of the white race have received more attention than those of the yellow, red, and black races. The two chief families of languages that have been studied in European scholarship are the Indo-

European family and the Hamitic-Semitic family. In the Hamitic-Semitic family belong Egyptian, Arabic, Hebrew, and other related tongues. The Indo-European family is the one to which English belongs, together with practically all the other languages of Europe and some of those of Asia.

It is the general custom in summary discussion to make eight main branches of the Indo-European family of languages, as follows: (1) the Aryan or Indo-Iranian, comprising the languages of ancient and modern India, Persia, and other regions in western and central Asia; (2) the Armenian; (3) the Hellenic, comprising the languages of Greece; (4) the Albanian, comprising the languages of Albania and adjoining regions; (5) the Italic, including Latin and all its derivations, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and other Romance languages; (6) the Celtic; (7) the Balto-Slavic, including Lettish, Lithuanian and Old Prussian on the Baltic side, and the many languages of Russia and neighboring regions on the Slavic side; (8) the Germanic.

All of these branches might be analyzed further into smaller language groups, into their branchlets and twigs, and for the purposes of illustration, the Germanic branch, as of most immediate interest, may be thus continued. The Germanic branch is divisible into three main sub-branches, the East Germanic, the North Germanic, and the West Germanic. The East Germanic branch is represented by Gothic, now no longer existing as a spoken language and known only as recorded in a small body of written literature. The North Germanic sub-branch includes the languages of Norway and Sweden, of Denmark and Iceland. The West Germanic sub-branch com-

prises Frisian, Low German, Dutch, High German, and English. Each of these minor divisions has its own further chronological and other divisions. Thus English is chronologically divided into the three main periods of Old English or Anglo-Saxon, to about 1150 or 1200, Middle English, to about 1500, and Modern English thereafter. But of course each of these chronological divisions is in turn susceptible of further dialectal division. In Modern English one might easily be led to distinguish between British English, American English, Canadian English, Australian English, and South African English. Each of these groups permits still further differentiation. American English, for example, is not a single unified speech, and it might be divided into Eastern American, Southern American, and Western American. Even then the limits of sub-division have not been reached, for all Eastern American speech is not alike, nor is all Southern and Western.

Manifestly this kind of dialectal sub-dividing could be continued until finally one reached the individual speaker as the ultimate indivisible unity. By this method of counting, there would be as many English languages in the world as there were persons who used the English tongue. This extremity of differentiation is not what is meant, however, when one speaks of separate languages. All the individual local and class dialects of the world are not separate languages. We return, therefore, to the original questions, What is it that makes a language separate and individual, and what is the character of the relationship which exists between languages which are said to belong to the same family?

In the first place, racial origin and local habitation are

not determining elements in establishing the separate character of a language. The fact that a group of people have a uniform speech is by no means an indication that they are of the same racial origin, or that the language originated with the race. The English race and the English language are a blend of Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Celtic, Scandinavian, perhaps pre-historic Pictish, and many other race and language elements. The French are equally mixed, Celts, Latins, Northmen, and other strains being mingled with their Frankish base. In a modern society like that of the United States, the combination of races is almost indescribable. But with all this mingling of races, uniformity of language has not been prevented, but has on the contrary become so great in many instances as to obscure the facts of race mixture. From this the conclusion is to be drawn that language is more significant than blood as an element in the development and spread of human culture. The peoples of the world do not have their particular languages by any physiological or natural necessity. Probably any person under favoring circumstances could acquire perfectly any language of the world. A child of Chinese parentage, for example, who had never heard a word of any language except English, would speak English in exactly the same way as the English children with whom he associated. So also an English child brought up exclusively in Chinese surroundings would acquire the Chinese language as perfectly as any Chinese child. Languages are of such relatively late cultural development that they pass easily from one human group to another human group, and by their amalgamating power often produce the feeling for a race unity among groups of very diverse race origins. It is impossible for any

human being to add a cubit to his stature, to change the color of his eyes or of his hair by taking thought, but it is possible and relatively easy for human beings to change their language. In northern Italy one meets with persons who by their blue eyes, yellow hair, and blond complexions ought to be Germans, but who speak nothing but Italian. The son of an Arab or an Armenian in the United States will feel himself to be English by virtue of his English speech. Still more striking is the ease with which the English language has been appropriated by the hundreds of thousands of negroes of African descent in the United States. Under similar surroundings the negroes speak an English undistinguishable from that of their white neighbors. Prejudiced observers sometimes deceive themselves and declare that they can always tell the speech of a negro by a peculiar quality determined by the physical character of the negro's organs of speech. But the test of experiment and of common sense does not support any such statement. Certain qualities of voice and intonation by a kind of conventional generalization may be held to be characteristic for negro speech, but these supposedly typical qualities cannot be made universal for negroes in their actual speech any more than other typical qualities can be so regarded for other kinds of speech. All New Englanders do not speak with a drawl and a nasal twang, nor do all negroes have soft, rich, and musical negro voices. Nor are the lips of the negroes so full that they cannot form adequately the standard sounds of English speech. Like all other English, negro English has many variations, but it has no generic character resulting from the negro's physiological organization.

The limits of a language and of a nation are not neces-

sarily the same. They are likely to be, however, inasmuch as community of language is one of the chief reasons which lead people to desire to set up common governmental and political organizations. The self-determination of nations usually results from a previously determined language unity. As a political expedient, moreover, nations may require familiarity with the national speech before admission to citizenship is granted and thus by formal decree may define the nation as consisting only of those who use a particular speech. On the other hand, some nations may be made up of speakers of a great variety of languages, like the former Austro-Hungarian empire, or like China, where the speech of one section may be quite unintelligible in another section. A decree of the Soviet republic in Russia recognized some half-dozen different languages in the republic and required that public laws and announcements shall be issued in these several languages. One cannot say, therefore, that the English language is the English language because it is the speech of those persons who live under English governmental institutions. It would be truer to say that English governmental institutions are themselves the offspring and result of the English language.

The terminology of the classification of languages into families or stocks, with branches and sub-branches like a genealogical tree, does not arise from the nature of languages. This terminology is indeed of metaphorical origin and cannot be understood literally. The genealogical method is a convenient way of classifying languages, but it is not true that languages have a generational existence like families, or like the successive descendants of a tree or other plant. The sense in which all the

languages of the Indo-European family go back to the same source is not literally the same as the sense in which all the grandchildren and great-grandchildren in a family are the descendants of an ancestor. For languages at no time have an existence as things in themselves. In the economy of the universe there has never been any such entity as an Indo-European or a Hamitic-Semitic or any other linguistic seed or germ which contained in itself the possibilities of a necessary growth and differentiation. Languages in short are not physical substances with independent existences, but, on the contrary, they have being only as they occur as parts of the mental life of living persons. If all the speakers of a particular language should perish, leaving no record of their language behind them, the language itself would then be absolutely non-existent. A language cannot exist before or apart from the people who speak it, nor can it exist after the people who spoke it are no longer living, except as they have left records behind them which later people interpret and bring to life again. Languages are social habits or customs, and therefore have no more external or separate existence than religious ritual or other social customs. Family groups may exist by descent of blood, but strictly speaking, there can be no families of languages the members of which spring by natural succession from a common progenitor.

When the related members of a family of languages are carried back to a common source, this common source as a living language must have had the same character as any of the so-called derived languages. For example, the separate branches of the Indo-European family, when they are compared with each other, justify the assumption

that the similarities among them are too great to be the result of chance and that the elements they have in common come from a common source. This common source is called the Indo-European parent speech. This Indo-European parent speech is not the language of any of the known Indo-European peoples nor is it recorded in any documents. It is a theoretical reconstruction, made by inferences drawn from the study of the several Indo-European languages. But into this concept of the parent speech, obviously only those elements can be put for which the several Indo-European languages as they are known provide evidence. The Indo-European parent speech is thus a theoretical reconstruction, based upon circumstantial evidence. As to its real character as a living spoken language, we know nothing beyond what our common experience of languages leads us to expect. Of this we may be sure, however, that the Indo-European parent speech was no absolutely primitive unified language stock, standing ready and waiting for a great historical development about to take place. On the contrary, the Indo-European parent speech was a language like English or French or German today, a language with an immense period of development behind it and an immense variability in its daily practical uses. That this parent speech became the language of a large number of diverse races dwelling at different places is adequately accounted for by the ease with which a language under favoring circumstances extends itself over new territories. In the case of the Indo-European parent speech, these favoring circumstances may have been the superior military and conquering power of the people who spoke the language, or they may have been the migratory and colonizing

adventures of these people, or, most effectively of all, they may have been the possession of a higher cultural civilization than that of the tribes with which the parent Indo-European came into contact.

In some respects a parallel situation is afforded by the development of the English language in our own day. The English language as we know it falls readily into several large groups on the basis of geographical distribution. These various groups are all related to each other in the sense that they are all modified forms of what might be called the English parent speech. But this English parent speech is not any actually existing English dialect. It is merely a concept of unity derived from the observation of those features which the differing forms of English have in common. In the English language these common features are very numerous. Differentiation in the English language has not gone so far as it went in the various modifications of the Indo-European group of languages. In the future, however, the branches of the English language may each take on strikingly individual characteristics, making of them as distinctly separate languages in relation to each other as the eight branches, with all their sub-branches, of the Indo-European family are separate languages in relation to each other and to the primitive Indo-European parent speech. But, on the other hand, no such development may take place. The centralizing and unifying forces which now hold the various manifestations of English together may not grow weaker but stronger. English may spread further and further over the globe, and yet may not lose any of its generic quality. The extent to which this has already happened is extraordinary. And in this respect also,

English probably bears a strong resemblance to our hypothetical Indo-European parent speech. Something gave to the Indo-European parent speech a centralizing and amalgamating power that seems little short of miraculous. What was it that caused the same idiom, in wave after wave, to encompass peoples so different as Russians and Scandinavians, Teutons and Italians, Celts and Aryans? All language stocks are not so extensible, so acquisitive in their powers. On the contrary, some language stocks have been as remarkable for their feebleness of grasp as English and the Indo-European parent speech are for their vigor and comprehensiveness. Among the American Indians north of Mexico, for example, a competent analysis makes at the least fifty-eight "distinct linguistic families." Some of these families, like the Athapascan and the Algonquin, are more comprehensive than others, but none of them exhibits, or in the past has exhibited, a strong amalgamating or expanding power. A similar abundance of language families is found among the uncivilized Africans, and here also, as among the Indians, a particular linguistic stock or family may be represented only in the speech of one or two tribes. The situation among the Indians and the Africans is as it would be if German, Dutch, Danish, and all the other languages of Europe were each as unlike the other as any one of them is unlike Chinese or Hebrew. But English and German, Dutch and Danish, Greek and Italian, and all the other tongues of Europe are related to each other because to a very large extent they are constructed out of the same language materials, and because these language materials were supplied to them from the same rich and energetic source. It was the

expanding power of the Indo-European parent speech that has made this speech the common idiom of the whole of Europe, and it is this expanding power that gives to any language its definite and typical traits as a language.

The answer to the question what gives to a language its distinctive or specific character as a language now becomes apparent. Languages grow by the spread of language habits. They may start with individuals or families. It is conceivable that the Indo-European parent speech originated in the family of some particularly powerful or beneficent tribal leader. His leadership drew others to him. Group thus united with group until a powerful culture community developed. From this community then radiated impulses of imitation and assimilation which may have made a great kingdom or empire. As the community widened, however, it also became less capable of holding together. Dissimilation followed assimilation, and thus new culture groups, each with its own modifications in language, sprang up within the larger circle of the original parent group. In terms of these developments a language may be defined therefore as a form of speech which by the spread of social custom has come to be regarded by a group of people as one of the distinctive marks of their cultural unity.

The forces which have operated in the English language to produce a high degree of similarity, even among English speaking groups widely separated geographically, are all susceptible of observation within historical periods. In this they differ from the tendencies which produced the unity in diversity of the Indo-European family of languages. The cultural history of these languages began and ended at a time preceding historical record, though

it cannot be doubted that general social conditions not unlike those present in English were present in the expanding days of Indo-European civilization.

When English first appears in the clear light of history as an independent language, it was the speech of a relatively small number of not highly civilized Teutonic tribes, dwelling in the northwest regions of ancient Germany. These were the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons of the records. The three groups seem to have had more or less definitely established tribal independence, and when they migrated to England in the second half of the fifth century, each tribe maintained its individual character by settling in a separate region. The Angles in the main settled in northern England, the Saxons in southern England, and the Jutes near the eastern coast south of the Thames. The three tribes also maintained more or less distinctive and individual languages, though the differences were not great enough to destroy the sense of identity in the three dialects. But the integrating tendencies of the Anglo-Saxon period, though always present, were not notably strong. Several national leaders appeared, especially Alfred, who aroused in the people some sense of a national unity, but the other elements of Anglo-Saxon culture, language, literature, religion, and social customs in general, to the time of the Norman Conquest remained experimental and scattering, as yet unfused into a homogeneous, native, and national civilization. The two elements in it, Teutonic and Latin, each had its own share in the national life, but each in the main on its own level. When the Anglo-Saxon community of the early eleventh century came into conflict with more powerful enemies, first the Danes in the time of Cnut and

before, and then scarcely a generation later, the Normans in the time of William, its resistance to attack was only feeble. The whole structure of Anglo-Saxon formal culture collapsed, and when one looks at the English people and the English language in 1100, one finds little to foreshadow the great future that was awaiting both. The expanding and assimilating power of the English language had not yet manifested itself because the elements were not yet present in English life which could give to the language exceptional carrying power.

The details of the story of the gradual development of the subjugated England of the eleventh century into the powerful nation of modern times belong elsewhere, but the influences that worked through the language to bring about this result may be briefly noted. In the first place the importance of a distinguished and admired written literature can scarcely be exaggerated. By the end of the fourteenth century, in the writings of Chaucer, Langland, Gower, Wiclif, and others, the English people possessed a body of literature which remained as a steadying and centralizing influence among the many uncertainties and fluctuations of the colloquial uses of the language. In the two succeeding centuries, this tradition was strengthened by the writers who have been accounted the greatest masters of English literature, Spenser, Jonson, Shakspere, and the other Elizabethans. To these must be added the English Bible and the English Prayer Book. At the time of Shakspere's death, England was still a small, insular nation, the period of political expansion had not yet begun, but, in its literature, England had already acquired a past, an ideal and an aspiration, which the English-speaking peoples have not yet outgrown. The

first English colony overseas destined to become important was planted in the latter years of Shakspere's life, but these very first colonists carried with them a respect for the literary language of the mother country which made them take heed against departing too widely from it. They began a tradition which still survives.

Before the end of the sixteenth century England had also reconstructed the ecclesiastical and religious life of the nation in such a way as to make of it something which demanded expression in the most intimate forms of the vernacular. A legal and official church and religion might have got along with Latin, but a church and religion arising out of and satisfying popular opinion and feeling could not adequately realize itself except in terms of a native idiom. The English Bible, the Prayer Book, English hymns, sermons, tracts, and controversial writings in English, these also became powerful forces in enabling the English people to realize themselves as possessing an English language. The popular interests of the Reformation in England did not make the language, nor did the language in itself make the Reformation, but the two acted upon each other, and from this interaction came the strengthened conviction of the English people that they had a religion and church of their own and that they had a common speech of their own which made this church and this religion intelligible and significant to them.

Naturally the political unification of England gave to various aspects of English social life a more general character than they otherwise would have enjoyed. But the special significance of England's political development from the point of view of stabilizing the national language

and of fixing it in the national consciousness lies not so much in its unity or in its powerfulness, but in its peculiarly popular character. A highly unified and effective government might conceivably have very little relation to the speech of the people who lived under the government. Such might very readily be the case in a country under an autocratic government. But in England politics and government became concerns of the popular mind, both for theoretical consideration and for practical deliberation and execution. When Englishmen migrated, they carried with them the habit of discussing and of ordering their public life in terms of the language that was familiar to them from infancy. The English language again was the inseparable accompaniment of all that the Englishman strove to accomplish in the administration of his public affairs.

These are but a few of the more important causes that strengthened the feeling for a type or generic language in England in the early centuries of the modern era. They were all fully present and developed before the great period of England's physical expansion began, and they were the influences which have caused the English language to be carried wherever the English people have gone. If the English people in the seventeenth century had had no literature, had had no immediate comprehension of their religion, had had no popular governmental life, they might have emigrated as extensively as they have done, but almost certainly their language would have been absorbed by other languages which had back of them the force of more fully realized national purposes. English has not become one of the most widely distributed languages in the world by reason of any particular virtue inhering in

the language itself. Any language might become a world language. English has become one of the great languages of the world because of the cultural impulses that express themselves by means of the English language. Only one other language of Europe has shown a similar vitality and comprehensiveness. In the days of the empire, Latin became the vehicle for conveying the ideas of a civilization not less variously and powerfully conceived than the English civilization of the seventeenth century. Wherever Romans went, the Latin language went with them. Whoever aspired to be a Roman, followed the path of the Latin language. So Latin passed from Rome to Spain, to France, to various other regions where it maintained itself and became native.

If one asks why the Latin of Rome became the very different Spanish and Portuguese of Spain and Portugal, the Italian and French of France and Italy, whereas the English of England and America, even after the passing of three centuries, shows only comparatively minor differences and remains in the general apprehension as one language, the answer must be found in the greater centralizing possibilities of the modern manner of living. Commerce, easier and more rapid transportation by land and by water, printing, the invention of devices which become universal necessities for comfortable living, all these have helped to prevent English from splitting into a group of languages as different from each other as are the several modern Romance languages. In the period of Indo-European expansion, the integrating influences were probably still weaker than they were in the well organized civilization of the Romans, and the differentiation in the forms of the Indo-European source language, as they

established themselves in various regions, was therefore greater than in the modifications of Latin in medieval Spain, France, and Italy. In developments of this kind, time is less important than the character of the elements entering into the development. If the English of America has differentiated but slightly from the English of England in the past three hundred years, unless other circumstances change, it is reasonable to infer that the modification in the next three hundred years will remain as slight. No one can prophecy what the next three hundred years will bring forth, but that the English speaking peoples of the world will be drawn into a closer cultural unity, and that therefore their language will tend to become more uniform, these are certainly not remote possibilities. The analogy of what happened in the Indo-European period of expansion can be made to apply to English only in so far as the circumstances attending both are similar.

The difficulties in listing the various languages of the world come not with languages like Latin, English, French, German, and other languages of peoples with a highly developed and organized civilization. With such peoples the clear realization of the possession of a language is one of the chief elements in their development and civilization. But among peoples on a lower level of cultural development, the outlines of language are often vague, as are the outlines of the other social and political practices of such peoples. The three score separate and distinct families of languages among the North American Indians are each represented by several, and often by many independent tribal languages. One of the tests by which a tribe was constituted as a tribe was the fact that it possessed a form of language of its own. But

the history of the American Indians shows that these tribal organizations were often very impermanent. Tribes in many instances completely disappeared, and their languages with them, sometimes by extinction, more often by being absorbed into other tribes. Language differentiation apparently took place very easily among the American Indians, with no historical tradition, no written language, no academic authority to check it. A group of families settling itself in one locality soon developed into a tribe, with a language and a mythology of its own. But as such groupings were easily made, so they were easily broken. The whole social life of such peoples was of necessity fluctuating and uncertain. Their language came and went, almost with the ease and rapidity of natural phenomena. The number of separate tribal languages which existed at any given moment among the American Indians must have been many hundreds. A similar abundance of language forms has been brought under observation in the Bantu languages of Africa. The great lack of civilizations like those of aboriginal America and of Africa is stability and continuity of cultural tradition. Without these, speech does not have the opportunity to develop into the full stature of a language as language figures in the social life of civilized peoples.

The comparative study of the many languages and families of languages of the world does not bring the student of language any nearer to the notion of a single original language for all mankind. The fifty-nine families of languages among the American Indians are constituted as such by the fact that each one of the fifty-nine is fundamentally different from every other, that each one is

actually, so far as the evidence shows, an independent and separate creation of the faculty of speech in mankind. If the American Indians are all the descendants of a single small group of primitive ancestors with a homogeneous and unified culture, this fact is not reflected in their languages. For the fifty-nine language stocks cannot be reduced to a unity. On reflection, however, perhaps one would not expect to be able so to reduce them. The further back one goes towards the beginnings of human civilization, the more certainly one finds differentiation and diversity, not uniformity in language. The more primitive the social conditions, undoubtedly the greater the number of languages and families of languages. The various families of languages now represented on the globe are but a small fraction of those that must have existed, and the human world has in fact moved towards uniformity in language, not from it. Between the Indo-European family of languages and the Hamitic-Semitic, or between either of these and any other of the families of languages of the world, no bonds of unity are to be looked for except such as may result from the occasional borrowings of the one from the other in comparatively recent times. As language structures, each is apparently a survival from that primitive stage of language creation in which human speech flowed back and forth through the minds of its human containers with unlimited ease and richness of variation. Some few of these surviving structures, like the languages of the Indo-European family, become stabilized in literature and in nations, and these we think of as preëminently the languages of the world. Others remain, like the tribal tongues of the red Indians and the black Africans, not so highly esteemed,

but greater in numbers and closer to the primitive conditions of the origins of all languages.

The specific marks of resemblance by which several languages are recognized as belonging to the same family naturally vary with the different groups. All languages are not constructed of the same language materials. In the Indo-European family of languages one of the striking characteristics of the group as a whole is that all the languages in it are inflectional. To one familiar only with the languages of Europe, inflection may seem to be a necessary and universal feature of language. But certain languages, like the Chinese for example, make practically no use of inflection at all, and other languages, like the Turkish, indicate the relationships of words by means of prefixes, suffixes, and infixes in a way structurally quite different from the inflectional devices of the Indo-European languages. The Indo-European languages are not only inflectional, but they employ a common stock of inflections. The Indo-European languages are not the only inflectional languages of the world, and therefore when one finds that they are all inflectional and also that their inflections are to a very large extent the same, allowing for historical modifications which are susceptible of systematic explanation, then the conclusion is unavoidable that both inflection as a type of language construction and the particular set of inflections present in the Indo-European languages are to be explained as transmissions from a common original to all the diverse languages of the family.

The evidence for the doctrine of Indo-European unity is not single, however, but varied, and it grows in force by accumulation. Another obvious mark of similarity

among the languages of the family is the possession of a common treasury of words. This does not mean that all the languages of the Indo-European family have precisely the same stock of words and that all these words came from the original Indo-European parent speech. On the contrary, each of the Indo-European languages contains many words not found in the others. Each is a composite, containing many elements from various sources added to the common Indo-European base. But with all their individual differences, the Indo-European languages possess a common vocabulary which can be accounted for reasonably only on the supposition that this vocabulary has a common origin. The differences in the vocabularies of the several languages are to be explained by the differences in their separate experiences and circumstances, but the similarities can be explained only on the ground of a common originating source. They are too numerous to be coincidences, or to be regarded as incidental borrowings of the one from the other.

When one looks at the words in the common vocabulary of the Indo-European languages, however, the identity of these words is not always apparent to the inexperienced eye. The English word *hill* is the same as Latin *collis* — that is, it is the same from the point of view of the common Indo-European original vocabulary. From this common vocabulary, both Latin and English, or better, both the Italic and the Teutonic branches of the Indo-European family of languages derived this word. So also English *hund-*[*red*] is the same as Latin *cent-*[*um*], and English *harvest* contains the same Indo-European root element as Latin *carpere*. English *head* is the same as Latin *caput*, and English *farrow* is the same as Latin

porcus. These few examples will serve to illustrate a point of very great importance. It will be noticed that in all these words the sound of Latin *c* [*k*] appears in English as the sound of *h*. In Latin *porcus*, English *farrow*, the correspondence is obscured, but English *farrow* is a Modern English development from Anglo-Saxon *fearh*, where the regular *h* appears. But in this word Latin *p* appears also as Anglo-Saxon *f*. The same correspondence of Latin *p* and English *f* will be seen in *caput* and *head* if the Modern English *head* is carried back to its Anglo-Saxon original *hēafod*. And Latin *carpere* and English *harvest* seem a little closer when we look at the Anglo-Saxon form of *harvest*, which is *hærfest*. These examples then illustrate the point that when the sounds in the various words common to the Indo-European languages differ, they differ in regular and explainable ways. Many of these sound changes have been grouped under laws, each branch having its special set of laws. To the common system of inflections and the common vocabulary, a third common possession of the Indo-European language may thus be added, the possession of a common system of sounds, modified in transmission, just as the words were often modified in their meanings and the inflections in their forms, but nevertheless traceable to their common origins because the modifications have been systematic and regular. A full description of these changes would be complicated and would of necessity take account of a great variety of forms in many different languages, and also of certain exceptions to the regular workings of the laws. Many of the illustrations, however, are simple and no less convincing than the more recondite. Such pairs of words as Latin *labium*, English *lip;* Latin *nepos*,

Anglo-Saxon *nefa*, nephew; Latin *decem*, English *ten;* Latin *tres*, English *three;* Latin *jugum*, English *yoke;* Latin *cutis*, English *hide*, are not only clearly related to each other on the side of meaning, but their consonantal resemblances likewise become obvious when allowance is made for the changes which took place in the process of the differentiation of the several languages.

The modern science of etymology in the Indo-European languages concerns itself very largely with the discovery of these more or less obscured elements of similarity in the words of the various languages. To be credible an etymology must satisfy the common-sense demand of some kind of logical connection between the two words which are regarded as etymologically related, and it must satisfy also the rules of sound change as these rules have been formulated through the study of large numbers of examples. The Latin word *porcus* may not look much like Anglo-Saxon *fearh*, English *farrow*, but the regular sound changes involved make this etymology not only credible but indubitable. On the other hand one may find words which look alike but are only deceptively alike. Latin *cura*, for example, looks like English *care*, Anglo-Saxon *cearu*, and these words mean something similar. But words in Latin containing *c* [*k*] should appear in English with *h*, and this simple statement proves that English *care* is not Latin *cura*, in the sense that both are derivatives from the common parent vocabulary. In spite of their similarity, the two words are not related to each other. The study of etymology indeed calls for an exact scientific method, and it calls moreover for a store of linguistic knowledge not at the command of every casual observer. Etymologizing is therefore not a matter

for idle guessing or for ingenious surmise, but it is a science based upon a technical method that only the scholar properly equipped can adequately apply.

The Latin word *porcus* and the English word *farrow* suggest a further point in etymologizing. For English not only has *farrow*, but it also has *pork*, and if Latin *p* should appear as English *f* and Latin *c* [*k*] as English *h*, how can *pork* be accounted for? But the explanation is simple. The word *pork* was borrowed comparatively recently from Latin through French. Modern English contains hundreds of Latin words like this, taken either through French or immediately from Latin. Such words were often carried over without any formal change at all, like *codex* and *integer*, and often only with slight changes. But all these borrowed words from Latin were brought into English within historical times, beginning with the Anglo-Saxon period. They are quite different from the old words which appear both in Latin and in English and which antedate the historical contacts of the English and the Romans. These older words are not borrowings by English from Latin, but they are present in both languages because each borrowed them from a common source. Each borrowed them from the parent Indo-European stock, and each modified them in ways peculiar to its own language.

Just as the various Indo-European languages have features in common which justify the inference that these common characteristics once existed together in a parent speech from which the derivative languages received them, so also the relationship of the individual languages in the separate branches implies an original parent branch speech from which the common features of the several

branches are derived. Thus if English has the verb *think*, and German has *denken*, and Old Norse has *thekkja*, and other Germanic dialects have obviously related forms, each with the phonetic modifications peculiar to its group, the reasonable inference is that these several forms were derived from a common source, not that one Germanic dialect borrowed from another. The question where the General Germanic parent speech got these forms when similar forms are not present in other branches of the Indo-European family and when the inference of direct inheritance from the Indo-European parent speech seems dubious, may be deferred for a moment.

Among the languages of Europe, the clearest illustration of differentiation within a single branch is afforded by the Romance languages. Within historical times the Latin of ancient Rome has taken on the forms of modern Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and several other languages. The process which resulted in the formation of the different Germanic languages began earlier, but it must have been similar. The original proto-Germanic or General Germanic from which the common features of the Germanic languages came, is not known directly from historical records, because it existed three or four centuries before the Christian era, and in a type of society in which historical records were not made. Its existence therefore is an inference, made on the basis of the common features found in the different Germanic languages. One of these common features is a peculiarity in the inflection of the adjective dependent upon its syntactical position. In Latin and Greek, which represent the original Indo-European custom in this respect, the adjective is inflected in but a single way, no matter what

its position. But in the Germanic languages the adjective is inflected in one way, called the strong inflection, when it is not preceded by a definite or demonstrative word, and in another way, called the weak inflection, when it is preceded by a definite or demonstrative word. Just how this peculiarity of the Germanic languages arose is not certainly known, but it is an obvious and strikingly individual characteristic. In Modern English it is of course lost, since Modern English has given up all inflection of the adjective. But it is still present in German, and in Anglo-Saxon it was a regular feature of the grammar of the language.

A second common characteristic of the Germanic languages undoubtedly taken over into each of them from some remote proto-Germanic speech, is the formation of verbs after the type known as the weak verb. In modern English these are the verbs commonly known as the regular verbs, and in the English language they have become the prevailing type. Their main characteristic is the formation of their past tenses by the addition to the root of a suffix which appears in Anglo-Saxon as *-de*, *-ede*, or *-ode*. Again one would look in vain for verbs of this type in Greek and Latin. Besides the weak verbs, the Germanic languages also have strong verbs, which show the distinction between present and past tense by a variation in the radical vowel. In Modern English these verbs are called irregular verbs, as for example, *write*, *wrote*, *written*, *sing*, *sang*, *sung*. This manner of verb formation is very old in the Germanic languages, and is, in fact, an inheritance from the Indo-European parent speech which the Germanic languages share with other members of the family. But the formation of verbs after

the weak type is a relatively recent addition, brought into the Germanic languages from those particular sources which have provided the language materials that make the Germanic languages a group to themselves.

A third distinguishing trait of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family is the presence in them of a large number of words which they possess in common but which are not found in the other Indo-European languages. In the dictionaries these are described as Common Teutonic words, and in the dictionary record, the number of them is surprisingly large. Among them would be English *all*, *apple*, *ash* (tree), *ash* (what is left after burning), *ask*, *ax*, *bake*, *bare* (not covered), *bath*, *bean*, *bed*, *bee*, *bid*, *bide*, *bind*, *dear*, *death*, *deep*, *deer*, *dew*, *doom*, *draw*, and so on through the rest of the alphabet. These illustrations are enough to show, however, that the Common Teutonic words of the Germanic languages are often words naming the most familiar objects and ideas. But though these words do not have related forms in the other branches of the Indo-European family, it would be unsafe to conclude that they are not of Indo-European origin. For it might well happen that one branch would preserve, or even extend in use, certain parts of its cultural inheritance which a different branch or group would permit to fall by the wayside. Such things continually take place in cultural transmissions, for cultures are not passed on as wholes, but only at those points at which minds chance to come vividly into contact with each other. In the case of some of the words just given it is almost certain that the Indo-European parent speech contained the hint or suggestion from which the words were developed. The Common Teutonic word *bake*, for example, quite

probably was developed from the same Indo-Germanic source as the Latin word *focus*, hearth, and the word *bed* may originally have applied only to the lair of an animal and may have sprung from the same source as Latin *fodere*, to dig. Even such striking characteristics of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family as the weak inflection of the adjective and the formation of the weak preterite of verbs in their origins probably grew out of something which was present in the parent Indo-European speech. The language of the Germanic branch differentiated not necessarily because it drew into its structure things entirely new, but because it developed in its individual way certain possibilities of the parent speech. The Germanic branch of the Indo-European family has remained predominantly Indo-European, both in its grammatical structure and in its treasury of words.

The sounds of the Germanic language, vowel and consonant, can also be traced, and for the most part clearly, to equivalents in the common Indo-European parent speech. The consonant changes are more susceptible of schematic statement than the vowel correspondences, and among the rules or laws which endeavor to take account of the relations of the consonants of the Germanic languages to the consonants of parent Indo-European is the law commonly known as Grimm's Law. This is also called the "first consonant shift" because it preceded a second less general change of consonants within the Germanic languages. The first consonant shift affected the whole Germanic group and it is one of the distinctive marks which constitute these languages as a group. The second consonant shift affected mainly High German, as represented by modern German, but not English and

its most closely related languages in the Germanic group. The second consonant shift accounts for the difference in the consonants of English *drink* and German *trinken*, English *soap* and German *Seife*, English *thick* and German *dick*, English *eat* and German *essen*, and so likewise in many other pairs of words. From these few illustrations one could derive the rules that where English has *d*, German has *t*, where English has *t*, German has *s*, *ss*, where English has *th*, German has *d*, and where English has *p*, German has *f*. These are only a few of the regular sound changes which account for the differences which distinguish German from English. Each member of the Germanic group of languages would have in the same way its set of distinguishing characteristics. The Germanic languages are therefore not all exactly alike, though they are more like each other than they are like any other languages. For just as the general Germanic branch remained prevailingly Indo-European, so each of the several Germanic languages has remained prevailingly Germanic. Perhaps English has modified its Germanic base more extensively than any other Germanic language, especially in the addition of French, Latin, and other loan words. Yet in its structural form, English is still obviously Germanic, and its vocabulary also, as the vocabulary is used in the actual concerns of speaking and writing, is much more Germanic than it is anything else.

The common words of the Germanic vocabulary do not always change their forms in the separate languages in a thoroughgoing way. The German word *Hund* is the same as the very similar English word *hound*, German *waschen* is English *wash*, German *Buch*, *Lamm* are English *book*, *lamb*. Of none of these words can it be said, however,

that English has taken them from German. Neither can it be said that German has taken them from English. The true statement is that both have taken them from the same source, from the common Germanic speech upon which all the Germanic languages drew, just as the various Romance languages drew upon the common fund of the Latin language, and the various Indo-European languages on the common fund of the Indo-European parent speech. German words in English which were directly borrowed from German are comparatively few in number and almost all of recent importation into the language. Examples are words like *kindergarten*, names of foods like *pretzel*, *sauerkraut*, the word *waltz*, the word *meerschaum*, and some few scientific words. During the Great War a few German words gained currency, but modern borrowings are often ephemeral and most of these war words have already disappeared from general English use. The deep and intimate bonds of connection between the English and the German language antedate the birth of political and national distinctions.

XXIV

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

The word "style" is often felt to be an ambitious and intimidating term. It is like the word "genius," to be used sparingly and only in application to the few and the great. The modest person does not pride himself on having a style. If he hopes he has it, he thanks God and says nothing about it. If he is convinced that he has it not, he realizes that he is also limited in other ways, and accepts this as merely one more of the inescapable conditions of his existence.

Undoubtedly a great deal of this distrust results from the vagueness of the word. One hears a great deal of the mystery of style. Nevertheless much ink has been spilled, though it must be acknowledged for the most part in vain, in the attempt to define style. The truth seems to be that style is a quality so subtle, and at the same time of so many forms, that no readily comprehensible description of it can be adequate. Yet the thing itself is obvious in every man's experience. It is like life, always present, yet never at any moment to be definitely segregated and analyzed. The effects of it, moreover, are produced by means commonly accessible. For all style must result from the use of language. Without language no effect in speech or writing could be produced, no thought or mood of thought, except such rudimentary ones as might be expressed by gesture, could be transferred from one being to another. But gesture is not language, or, if it is,

it is language in a state so primitive that the notion of style cannot apply to it.

Persons are not born with or without the gift of style by some inscrutable law of chance. Style is not a special natural faculty, granted to some and withheld from others, except in the sense that it results from the application of disciplined powers of observation and of discrimination to language, and thus like all aptitudes, it varies in individuals. But it is impossible to suppose that the case of any person who conceives the notion of acquiring a style is hopeless. Perhaps all persons should not aspire to be Ciceros or Miltons, should in fact aspire to be only themselves. But every artificer in language who employs language with care for his art, may stand in some degree for a quality which can be designated by no other term than the general one of style. "Style is the invariable mark of any master," says Stevenson in *A Note on Realism*, "and for the student who does not aspire so high as to be numbered with the giants, it is still the one quality in which he may improve himself at will."

There is thus nothing mysterious, nothing supernatural about the origins of style. The possibilities of style are present in every human being, and when the fact also is present, it has come by processes which are susceptible of examination and elucidation. But the methods of examination must be fine enough to do justice to the style. Otherwise it is better to take style, in the manner of the uncritical, as something unanalyzable, better to call it a subtle immanence, a *je ne sais quoi*, a strange revelation, which nobody can adequately describe in words.

Style connects so closely with personality that it has about it some of the limitations of personal character.

Since liking in style, as of persons, is a matter of taste, there can be no disputing of styles. From adverse decisions, no appeal is open, not even from that most bitter verdict of all which denies a writer style. When one stops to think, however, it is manifestly absurd to say that a writer, or merely a speaker, has no style. One might as reasonably say that a person's hair or eyes have no color, that his figure has no contour, as that his words or the forms of his expression have no style. If style is the man, as in a certain sense it truly is, then being a man carries with it the implication of the possession of a style. What the critic means when he says that a writer has no style is that the writer has not a style which appeals to the critic's sympathy, or that he has not a style which conforms to the standards of excellence or of procedure in style which the critic has accepted. Writing which may be said not to have style, for example, legal documents, is often nevertheless highly stylistic, even fantastically stylistic. On the other hand careful abstention from all stylistic exuberance may in itself produce a characteristic style. In his Essay on Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold maintained that Wordsworth "has no assured poetic style of his own." Wordsworth's poetry, when he is at his best, declares Arnold, "is inevitable, as inevitable as Nature herself. It might seem that Nature not only gave him the matter for his poem, but wrote his poem for him. He has no style." Shakspere, on the other hand, according to Arnold, has "a genius for style," as in the line from *Macbeth*,

"After life's fitful fever he sleeps well."

But Wordsworth's "most characteristic form of expression is a line like this from *Michael*,

"'And never lifted up a single stone.'"

There is nothing subtle in this, continues Arnold, "no heightening, no study of poetic style, strictly so called, at all; yet it is expression of the highest and most truly expressive kind."

In all this, however, there seems to be a willful paradox. How can writing be of the "highest and most truly expressive kind" without having style? The line from *Macbeth* is manifestly different from the line from Wordsworth's *Michael*. Shakspere's thought, in itself not simple, is expressed metaphorically and ornately, with the aid of alliteration. Wordsworth expresses a simple idea as simply as possible, and yet such is the magic of his style, that this simplicity in its proper setting, has both depth and dignity. To accomplish these ends in this way is one of the highest achievements of style. The heightened and elaborated style also has its place, but it is a question whether style that attracts attention to itself is really good. If one pauses to admire the ingenuity and art of a writer, attention is deflected from content to manner of execution. As modesty is never aware of itself, as the best manners in polite intercourse are revealed in the absence of manner, so that style is best which is least obtrusive. Virtuosity may arouse admiration, but praise thus won is scarcely worth the price that must be paid for it.

When one speaks of style, however, especially as applied to an art, something more is usually meant than those natural and for the most part unreasoned marks of difference which distinguish one individual from another. Exceptionally propitious circumstances may indeed result in the production of a natural style which the world

regards as excellent. So Bunyan is supposed to have written without art. But such circumstances are so exceptional that artists are not much inclined to depend on them. Wild nature is sometimes gloriously perfect, but more often uncertain and in need of manipulation of the circumstances to insure perfection. In other words, style in general implies cultivation. Cultivation in turn implies a certain degree of repetition, of fixing of habit. To become sure of one's self in writing means merely that practice has made choices easy, has clearly defined the paths of action which are then readily followed. Thus a writer, an artist of any kind, develops an accustomed manner of doing the thing in hand which becomes for him distinctive, becomes then not merely style, but a style. An observant reader could not mistake a paragraph from Macaulay for one from Burke, or one from Henry James for one from Thomas Hardy. This accustomed manner of doing things may grow to be so marked as to impress the observer as being manneristic, art becoming artificiality. Henry James often seems so to many readers, as does Meredith in a different way. It does not follow that this mannerism must be the result of conscious design, and indeed with a writer of merit it is more likely to be an altogether unintentional over-stepping of the bounds of the normal and generally acceptable in speech, merely an excess of individuality. "What would have seemed affectation in men of another mould was natural in him," says one of Meredith who knew him well, "just as in a different way was the excess in much of Swinburne's prose, great and strong critic as he was." [1]

A style pushed to the extreme may easily take on the

[1] Morley, *Recollections*, I, 40.

defects of its qualities. If the manner of the expression comes to seem more important to the reader than the matter it conveys, this is a danger signal to the writer that something is wrong. The just harmony of content and form has been violated, and cultivation, training, technique, have stepped out of their proper places as servants and become masters. Cultivation of style, it need scarcely be added, does not imply any interest in sophistical designs of pleasing. Style is cultivated by the artist for the sake of realizing more completely the end in view, though seldom is pleasure lacking as one of the ends of writing of significance.

Style as an habitual disposition towards a certain manner of expression, towards an expected and settled technique in language, is obviously a matter of choice. This settled habit may be the result of the completer organizing and systematizing of native inclinations, or it may result from the acceptance of some external type or standard of expression, as the Ciceronian followed Cicero, and as one English prose writer or versifier in the eighteenth century followed another so closely that the whole period acquired a highly unified stylistic character. In either case, so far as a style is successful in attaining the results aimed at, the processes by which it effected its purpose may be described and weighed. If it is not successful, the causes of its failure may also be estimated, though obviously a failure leaves one guessing what was the goal intended and thus always introduces an element of uncertainty in the situation. Certainty in style, however, is a subjective creation, as is all intelligibility in language. We cannot always be sure that our interpretations of effect are precisely the ones the author intended.

In judging both failures and successes one must therefore allow something, often a great deal, for the personal equation.

This desultory consideration of the meaning of style may perhaps be best brought to a conclusion by citing a few of the famous definitions of style. The best known of all is probably the one which declares that style is the man. This derives from the French naturalist Buffon, whose own phrasing ran, *le style est de l'homme même*, and whose meaning was that style arises so much from personal character that it cannot be transmitted, for example, by teaching, unlike facts and information in this respect, which are the same for all. It is interesting to note, however, that the main body of the article in which this definition occurs attempts to enforce a notion of style with which few would now agree. For it was Buffon's contention that style grows better as expression becomes more abstract and generalized, a doctrine quite in harmony with eighteenth century classicism, but not one that the modern world, with its love of the concrete and picturesque, regards with favor.

Another French definition is that of Stendhal. "*Le style*," he asserts, "*c'est ajouter à une pensée donnée toutes les circonstances propres à produire tout l'effet que doit produire cette pensée.*" This has been Englished as follows: "Style consists in adding to a given thought all the circumstances calculated to produce the whole effect that the thought ought to produce." [1]

In this definition there is food for thought. It seems to say no more, however, than that style consists in finding the appropriate means to reach the result in expression

[1] Murry, J. Middleton, *The Problem of Style*, p. 3.

which one wishes to attain. It is therefore very much like Swift's famous definition, "Proper words in proper places make the true definition of a style."[1] Swift amplifies this statement but slightly, adding that "when a man's thoughts are clear, the properest words will generally offer themselves first, and his own judgment will direct him in what order to place them, so as they may be best understood." Like most students of style, Swift finds it easier to point out improper than proper methods in style, and he devotes himself mainly to the criticism of certain defective styles, the mean and paltry, the slovenly, the affected, the pedantic, the vulgar, and others. This attitude is not without its wisdom, for if the seeker after the good learns to avoid the bad, by the simple process of exclusion he may at last arrive at his goal.

The various ideas contained in Pater's essay on *Style* in his volume of *Appreciations* recall Swift's description of style as proper words in proper places. "To give the phrase," says Pater at one place, "the sentence, the structural member, the entire composition, song or essay, a similar unity with its subject and with itself; — style is in the right way when it tends toward that." Pater was sympathetically inclined towards the convictions of Flaubert, especially the latter's insistence on the existence of but "one way of expressing one thing," a kind of organic and mysterious harmony between a thought and its expression which imposed upon the artist the necessity of finding the one absolutely necessary and appropriate expression for its corresponding thought. "The one word for the one thing," exclaims Pater, "the one thought, amid

[1] *Letter to a Young Clergyman, Works*, ed. Scott, Vol. VIII, p. 199.

the multitude of words, terms, that might just do: the problem of style was there! — the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay, or song, absolutely proper to the single mental presentation or vision within." But Pater continually insists that the quest for the right word must be carried through all the interrelations of structure of the whole composition. "In that perfect justice, over and above the many contingent and removable beauties with which beautiful style may charm us, but which it can exist without, independent of them, yet dexterously availing itself of them, omnipresent in good work, in function at every point, from single epithets to the rhythm of a whole book, lay the specific, indispensable, very intellectual, beauty of literature, the possibility of which constitutes it a fine art." Here in these ideas of Flaubert as amplified by Pater is a theory of style wide enough to include Shakspere and Wordsworth, to include any truly expressive writing. "Style in all its varieties," says Pater, "reserved or opulent, terse, abundant, musical, stimulant, academic, so long as each is really characteristic or expressive, finds thus its justification, the sumptuous good taste of Cicero being as truly the man himself, and not another, justified, yet insured inalienably to him, thereby, as would have been his portrait by Raffaelle, in full consular splendour on his ivory chair."

After much illuminating comment by the way, Sir Walter Raleigh in his little book on *Style* rests at the end on the idea of style as the man. "Good style," says Raleigh, "is the greatest of revealers, — it lays bare the soul," and words and language are merely the symbols by which the soul declares itself. "All style is gesture, the gesture of the mind and of the soul. Mind we have

in common, inasmuch as the laws of right reason are not different for different minds. Therefore clearness and arrangement can be taught, sheer incompetence in the art of expression can be partly remedied. But who shall impose laws upon the soul? It is thus of common note that one may dislike or even hate a particular style while admiring its facility, its strength, its skilful adaptation to the matter set forth. Milton, a chaster and more unerring master of the art than Shakespeare, reveals no such lovable personality. While persons count for much, style, the index to persons, can never count for little. 'Speak,' it has been said, 'that I may know you' — voice-gesture is more than feature. Write, and after you have attained to some control over the instrument, you write yourself down whether you will or no. There is no vice, however unconscious, no virtue, however shy, no touch of meanness or of generosity in your character, that will not pass on to the paper. You anticipate the Day of Judgment and furnish the recording angel with material."

After reading such words one must feel that it is a perilous thing to take one's pen in hand, for at any moment the pen may change into a sword of destruction. Sir Walter Raleigh's words call to mind, however, another similar definition of style. "Altogether the style of a writer," declared Goethe,[1] "is a faithful representation of his mind; therefore, if any man wishes to write a clear style, let him first be clear in his thoughts; and if any would write in a noble style, let him first possess a noble soul."

Less apocalyptic are the views of Robert Louis Steven-

[1] *Conversations with Eckermann*, in Spingarn, Goethe's *Literary Essays*, p. 266.

son in his essay on the *Technical Elements of Style in Literature*. As the title of this essay indicates, Stevenson in it is concerned with pointing out some of the manageable means by which the effects of style may be produced, such as rhythm, choice of words, choice of sounds that "shall be musical in the mouth." Stevenson here dwells on the artificer's skill in style, though he does not imply that all style is artifice. "That style is therefore the most perfect," he maintains, "not, as fools say, which is the most natural, for the most natural is the disjointed babble of the chronicler; but which attains the highest degree of elegant and pregnant implication unobtrusively; or if obtrusively, then with the greatest gain to sense and vigour." But style likewise in Stevenson's conception leads in the end to a kind of organic unity of expression and content. "Style is synthetic," he says, "and the artist, seeking, so to speak, a peg to plait about, takes up at once two or more elements or two or more views of the subject in hand; combines, implicates, and contrasts them; and while, in one sense, he was merely seeking an occasion for the necessary knot, he will be found, in the other, to have greatly enriched the meaning, or to have transacted the work of two sentences in the space of one."

To these several attempts to define style may be added the words of a more recent commentator. Style may most profitably be considered, says Brownell,[1] "as that factor of a work of art which preserves in every part some sense of the form of the whole." It is of course the ghost of Pater speaking here. "It is in truth," the definition continues, "the organic factor in art of any kind, the

[1] *The Genius of Style*, pp. 10, 11.

factor in virtue of which every part of any whole becomes at once a means and an end, each detail contributory as well as in itself significant. . . . More briefly one may say that a work of art possesses style when the detail, counting in itself, also contributes to the general effect."

A review of the formal definitions of style such as has just been made leaves one, it must be confessed, in a somewhat vague and uncertain state of mind. To the practical person, looking for ways and means, the dictum that style is the man, or that to have a noble style one must first have a noble soul, does not seem very helpful. Perhaps the most illuminating of these definitions of style is Pater's notion of style as something organic, something in the web and the texture of writing which holds together the separate parts of a piece of writing to form a harmonious whole. Yet how much web, how much texture must a piece of writing have before it can be considered to be an organic unity? No one ever conceived that a writer could reproduce or create the reality of life, that is, could really create an organism. The most skillfully drawn character in existence can only produce the illusion of reality, cannot be a real person. The most elaborate and vivid description cannot actually create a landscape with real trees, sky, and water. All the writer can do is to provide sufficient leads and suggestions to enable the hearer or the reader to construct for himself by a process of sympathetic assimilation the conviction that he has realized mentally a veritable person and a veritable landscape. These leads and suggestions constitute the web and the texture of writing. When they are present in sufficient power or quantity to cause the reader to feel them as a harmonious whole, then the writing in which

they occur may be said to have organic unity. The unity, however, lies not merely in the piece of writing but quite as much in the mind of the person who takes the writing and makes of it something significant in his living experience. The question then is, to repeat, how much suggestion, how much web and texture must writing have to enable the reader to put the breath of life into it? Since creation of reality is impossible, how far short of reality may one stop?

Now it seems that definitions of style have failed just in this respect, that they have neglected to take account of the double character of style, of all language. Style is not an absolute quality of writing, definitely and universally attained at a given moment. Nothing is more common than difference of opinion about styles. What one person likes another cannot endure, what one critic commends as the perfection of style, another condemns as miserable failure. Like intelligibility in all expression in language, style results when the mind is kindled and glows with the satisfaction of having attained for itself a sense of true and vivid reality. But the spark that may kindle one mind, may fall cold upon another. If the spark fails to ignite, if a whole shower of sparks fails to set the mind on fire, style is not present in the one half, and that the most important living half, of the experience of style. An elaborate web and texture may therefore have style in intent, but it is a barren style if it is not sympathetically assimilated and accepted. On the other hand, often a very meager effort may produce a powerful stylistic effect. Tombstone epitaphs are not ordinarily deeply moving forms of poetical composition, yet for one whose feelings are engaged, even the crude web and texture of this kind

of writing may be sufficient to produce a profound stylistic result, that is, may produce a sense of organic unity. In its own way and degree, this result is as stylistic as any experience of the more highly critical and sensitive person.

If then style always bears this double aspect, being on the one side a web or texture of indications and suggestions which, on the other side, may be vivified into some kind of coherent organization or impression by the person who receives the hints and suggestions, obviously a one-handled definition of style cannot correspond to the fundamental dualism. It is also obvious that if one attempts to reduce the whole matter of style to some kind of critical observation, the first half of the double activity, that is the web and texture, is much more tractable than the infinite variety of ways in which persons may respond to the outer stimulants to which they are exposed. This second half of the activity of style cannot be ignored. A sympathetic awareness of one's fellow beings is a necessity always in the satisfactory use of language. And just as the morals of good English, as they were set forth in a preceding chapter, imply a kind of organic unity in that the ultimate test of goodness must always be found in living experience, so also in style the interpretation is always the final and significant matter.

For definite analysis, nevertheless, the web and texture of style remains the more practicable and profitable aspect of the subject. And especially from the point of view of language the external forms which are to call forth the inner realization of style are manifestly of first importance. The web and texture of style is composed exclusively of language. No effect, no result in writing can

possibly be achieved except through the medium of forms and symbols of speech which serve as suggestive transmitters between the writer and the reader. The study of style on the side of form must be a study of language. As such it must have to do with definite choices and preferences, not always conscious, in the use of the mechanism of speech. If an artist produces an effect, a style, in language, he can produce it only by selecting from the infinite body of forms precisely those forms which are capable of producing the effect. Usefulness is therefore as necessary a principle in governing the processes of style as it is in any other of the aspects of the employment of language. The next endeavor shall be, therefore, to attempt to take account of some of the significant choices and adaptations which enter into those manifestations of the English language commonly designated by the term English style. These choices are not numerous, if one regards them in their general character, and may indeed be grouped under the heads choice of mood and aim, diction or choice of words, and choice of rhythm and melody.

XXV

MOOD AND AIM

The discussion of mood as an element in style finds a place in this book because the purpose of the book is to examine those attitudes of mind which are present when questions of choice arise in the use of language. Yet, whether in writing or at any other moment, moods might seem to be very slightly subject to choice or control. Moods rise and pass without our willing; they overcome us like a summer's cloud, they are gusts of feeling that blow us whither they list. By taking thought, we cannot conjure up moods at command. A happy juncture of circumstances is necessary before a happy mood can result. Moods which have no basis in reality are nightmares or day-dreams, without form or substance.

But if we cannot altogether control moods in their origins and passings, we can at least determine what moods are to be exploited and cultivated. Every person must respond to circumstances and to his native genius, but no one need weakly yield to circumstances, still less add will to what was unwilled. In their private characters, by cultivation some persons come to be prevailingly cheerful, others prevailingly somber, and similar possibilities are present in the cultivation of the arts. An occupation such as writing is not undertaken by the writer, certainly is not carried on, without early realization of the atmosphere, the temper most appropriate to what the

writer has to say. Not a great deal of skill is necessary before a writer realizes when he is out of key. Keeping in key in writing corresponds to the cultivation of habits of mood in personal character. Both in the end are likely to result in a disposition to view things in a certain expected light which we may dignify by calling it a philosophy. Herein, of course, lies a great danger to the writer. His mood may become a habit so fixed that he cannot escape from it, so constant that he no longer responds to changing circumstances, but imposes his professional mood, in season and out, upon all situations. Nothing is so wearing as the determination of a writer to be jocular, or sprightly, or weighty, or cynical, or anything else so consistently that variety and surprise disappear. The professional optimist is not consoling, nor is the professional pessimist alarming.

The choice among moods in style is so varied that to enumerate them all is impossible. The necessity of choice is present at all times, however, not only in the more formal attempts at literary composition, but also in the casual situations of colloquial intercourse. One must have a style and tone in conversation as well as in writing. In speech one may cultivate a brief, sententious style, a humorous style, a dry, restrained style or an emotionally expansive style. The habit of slang results from a highly colored mood, compounded of certain elements of vivacity, wit, flippancy, and smartness. That some conversational styles are better than others goes without saying, and a feeling for courtesy and good manners is the best guide to what shall be approved and what should be disapproved in conversational style. Yet manifestly no single mood is appropriate to all levels and kinds of colloquial experi-

ence. The person who cannot vary his conversational style soon becomes unendurable as a companion.

Mood as an element in literary style may be examined most instructively in the writings of persons who have attained a consistent manner of expression. Three modern English novelists may be taken as illustrations of three markedly different and distinctive moods. The style of Hardy, the first of the three, is characterized by a cold and direct simplicity, by what seems now and then a nonchalant indifference to the joys and sorrows he is setting forth. It has been said of him that he is more conscious of the stars than of the sun. A twilight mood of ironic melancholy permeates his writing so consistently that casual ornament or humor, except of a grim kind, finds little place in it. The second of the three, Meredith, on the other hand, is a much more obviously stylistic writer. His sentences, his syntax, his words, his transitions in thought are strikingly different from those of common custom. He abounds in epigram, in sudden moments of brilliant illumination, in electrical flashes of bright but intermittent light. The ingenious liberties he takes with the common idiom may look like willful eccentricities, and they are eccentricities when compared with styles less highly charged than his own. To require simplicity and matter of factness in this style, however, would be to deny its right to existence. The characteristic mood of Henry James, the third of the group, is not unlike that of the scientist or philosopher. Henry James examines the facts of experience in the steady white light of speculation, sometimes glowingly incandescent, more often mildly radiant, but penetrating to the most secret and obscure recesses of man's inner nature.

He seeks not merely the proper word in the proper place, but the proper adjustment of all the significant implications of an idea in their relations to each other. In the style of Meredith, an idea is illuminated by the instantaneous lightning flash of wit. In the style of Henry James, ideas gradually unfold themselves, by justification, by extension, by re-adjustment, often with an amplitude and complexity of effort that may leave the reader in doubt what the idea is by the time the end of the laborious exposition of it is reached. Stylists when not at their best are prone to exhibit the defects of their qualities. Sometimes Hardy seems indifferent, and Meredith spasmodic, but, at the other extreme, the defects of Henry James's style are painful elaboration of many ideas that the reader might have been willing to accept in their plain and native simplicity.

The three writers whose characteristic temperaments and styles have been briefly indicated by no means exhaust the possible choices of mood in writing. The vocabulary of criticism is rich in terms which designate varieties of stylistic mood. Few writers except the greatest escape the descriptive tags that appropriately apply to them. The broad impersonality of a Shakspere or of a Fielding cannot easily be covered by an adjective or two, but for the most part writers are highly individual and cultivate their peculiar moods so faithfully that there is no mistaking them. How different, for example, are Carlyle and Ruskin, Byron and Keats, Shelley and Wordsworth, yet how consonant each is with himself. These differences have been the occasion of much laborious comment, yet in spite of the many critical discussions of mood as an element in style, it cannot be said that the terms of

the discussion have acquired precise and established values. Each generation is likely to have its favorite set of critical adjectives and is likely to give these terms an emotional rather than an intellectual content. Thus the general commendatory adjective in the eighteenth century was elegant, and when one had said that a writer had an elegant style, nothing more was left to be said. Another old-fashioned adjective is nervous, but the phrase "a nervous style" is scarcely more descriptive than the phrase "an elegant style". The truth is, of course, that the processes of style have been so little subjected to dispassionate scientific analysis that no nomenclature of precise content has had an opportunity to develop. Perhaps the two terms most commonly met with in modern discussions of stylistic mood are the words classic and romantic. Yet any critic who set out with the intent to use these terms in serious criticism, would first be under the necessity of stating, and of stating very elaborately, just what he meant by them. Perhaps in time a science of æsthetics will be able to say precisely what are the characteristics of a classical style or of a romantic style. Great critical battles have been fought over these questions, as also over the question which of the styles is the more commendable and admirable, but only with the crude weapons of a vaguely defined terminology. Moods naturally are difficult of precise definition, being much more firmly apprehended by the simpler method of recognition, and still more difficult is the justification of one mood at the expense of any other. The true task of the critic is to approach intelligently all moods, the argumentative or the equable, the stern or the mild, the vituperative or the genial, the passionate or the dispas-

sionate, the chaste or the florid, the austere or the playful, the bitter or the jovial, the recalcitrant or the acquiescent, the meticulous or the heedless — and as many more as his experience confronts him with. So also must the practitioner in writing and in style seek to understand them, and among them make such selection of moods as he would be content to have appear in the final estimate of his literary character.

Choice of aim in writing is closely associated with choice of mood, but it is not the same thing. In the first place, there is much less range in choosing aims than in choosing moods. In fact, all aims in writing may be placed under two, the endeavor to please or to instruct. These endeavors are not likely to appear separately, though they are separable. Pleasure as an end in art may vary all the way from the amusement provided for a passing moment by an idle tale or poem to the joy in beauty which lasts forever. Instruction on the other hand, in its simplest form, may have to do merely with the orderly presentation of information. In its higher reaches, it may fulfill the obligation which the moralists have always laid upon the great poet, that he see life truly, and also enable others thus to see it.

Pleasure as an aim in writing need not be explained away or qualified too carefully as something beneath the concern of the serious writer. In the practice and in the witnessing of every performance of skill there is an essential pleasure always implicit. What one does or sees done well is agreeably stimulating, even though the thing done be nothing more than an exhibition of virtuosity. To be sure, virtuosity soon palls, and there must be something more than technical skill in any style which is to please

lastingly. Mere skill cannot be permanently interesting because it arouses and satisfies only the sense of wonder, and familiarity soon makes even the most wonderful exhibitions of technical dexterity seem empty and commonplace. Neatness in a chaste style and exuberance in a rich style are thus necessary qualities, but defects when the one suggests a kind of inhuman precision, the other a wild abandonment to all stylistic impulses. Technique is in its proper position when it performs its services efficiently, but not so efficiently that the form seems a greater achievement than the thought. A perfect epigrammatic form cannot make a good epigram out of insignificant material.

Besides affording pleasure by adequate craftsmanship, the competent stylist will not neglect any opportunity to give pleasure in a more positive way. There is every reason why this should be among the permanent endeavors in writing, just as politeness is one of the constant principles of conduct in social intercourse. The writer must decide for himself, it is true, how he may best give pleasure, and when Ben Jonson excised the poetic flights from his plays, he presumably did so not because he begrudged the reader any pleasure the reader might derive from them. That would have been the act of a boor, not an artist. His purpose was rather to provide for the reader a higher and better kind of pleasure than that which, by an error in judgment, as Jonson conceived, he had first provided. It is an open question, however, whether Jonson's second judgment was not really the error. An idea is rarely the better for being barely expressed. If bareness were a merit in itself, then the syllogism would be the most perfect form of writing. Ideas must be clothed with a

garment of language, not merely serviceably and decently, but if possible, attractively and pleasingly. An event or a thought in writing may be important in itself, and at the same time it may serve as an opportunity, as happenings in life do, for the exchange of much occasional interest and pleasure. The command to prune is an excellent one for beginners and for all writers, but there comes a time to stop pruning. Excessive pruning leaves nothing but a skeleton or trunk, the existence of which is justified only when it bears fruit and flower.

Writers are constantly in danger of pleasing themselves with too little regard for the pleasure of their readers. This is especially apparent in that form of ornamentation which consists in the excessive use of allusion, not merely in direct references to gods and goddesses, heroes and all the other literary machinery from the ancient and modern world that may have lingered in the writer's memory, but also in the use of words and phrases in ways peculiarly pleasing to the writer because of his own private and personal association with them. Nothing is more futile than this kind of private satisfaction. A retentive and capacious memory stores up an enormous number of such associations in the progress of a lifetime of reading, but everything remembered is not necessarily important enough to be brought into the light whenever occasion offers. Memory may be a curse as well as a blessing, a hindrance as well as an aid. A recondite allusion, which has nothing more to recommend it than its remoteness, or does nothing more than surprise the reader by its strangeness, is unworthy of the artist. A peculiarly annoying trick of style, often reprehended but still practiced, is the habit of alluding to something unfamiliar, which the

writer merely happens to remember and which he knows to be unfamiliar, as though it were matter of common knowledge. Even writers of experience are often guilty of this sin. This every-schoolboy-knows trick does not even require a rich memory, for assiduous note-taking and indexing will take the place of memory.

That writing should please may be readily granted, but shall we go further and assert that pleasure is the sole and only purpose of art, the art of using words as well as the arts more narrowly defined? But if the word pleasure is used in this way, it must be given a very wide significance. It is true that all experiences are painful or pleasurable or indifferent. The aim of an art can scarcely be to excite painful or indifferent impressions, therefore it must be to call forth the pleasurable in experience. Yet the way to pleasure may not be short and direct. It may lead through depression, fear, hesitation, and other unpleasant emotions. In the philosophy of Hobbes, all actions, even those of painful sacrifice, are explained as in the end arising from self-interest. But this philosophy, if true, explains the ultimate motive cause of experience rather than the nature for the moment of the experience itself. So also with this doctrine of pleasing in art. The result in an art must be satisfying, but the moment of pleasurable satisfaction may be long delayed and in doubt.

The classic statement of the aim of writing is that it should hold the mirror up to nature. The meaning of this phrase is not immediately clear, nor is it apparent why there should be any virtue in holding the mirror up to nature. The figure fails in exactness in this respect at least, that while a mirror reflects every object that comes

within its range, the purpose of art is not, and by the limits of human nature, cannot be thus inclusive. A photographic reproduction of life, even of physical life, which is of course the only kind that could be reproduced photographically, is not possible in writing. For all descriptive writing, even the most detailed, implies a translation from one order of the senses, that of seeing, to another order, that of hearing, and it implies also a change from direct experience to the indirect experience of memory and judgment. Writing must thus always be at least one remove from direct perception. Furthermore, the writer always selects for expression a certain number of details from a much greater, from an almost limitless abundance of detail. He must select in the first place because no human vocabulary is rich enough to name all the sensations that strike the mind through the eye or through the ear, or through any of the senses, or rich enough to enable any person even to guess at all the shades of thought and feeling that make up the spiritual life of man. Words supply at the best only rough indications of the most striking and most generally appreciated experiences of life. The artist selects also for the purpose of producing harmony and completeness of effect. Even the photographer does not take pictures at hap-hazard. He tries to find subjects that compose, and is not above manipulating them if by so doing he can make them compose better. Possibly and by rare accident a writer might find an action, a set of characters, and a background all arranged and ready in real life, leaving for him only the task of observing and recording. Nothing like this, however, really happens. The writer conceives his subject and then selects those details and only those

which are necessary to bring his conception before the mind of the reader.

The question of the message of writing inevitably arises in the discussion of aim. The problem of art for art's sake, if there be a problem implicit in this time-worn phrase, is less insistent in the art of writing than in the arts which appeal directly to the senses, like painting and music. But the problem simply stated is whether an object of beauty must carry a message or whether it finds its justification in itself, whether merely being is not all one should ask of it. Now the first difficulty is to determine what an object of beauty is in itself. To determine this, one must discover the nature of the appeal which the object of beauty rightly makes to human interest. Music, for example, has a language of its own, and the message of Beethoven's third symphony, to choose as instance a work which has often been supposed to have a message, can adequately be expressed only as Beethoven has expressed it, in terms of music. It is not conceivable that Beethoven wrote his symphony in order that someone else might translate it into terms of another art, for example, the art of language. The message of even the most programmatic of music cannot be expressed in words. The world of music and the world of words are two entirely separate worlds and there is no bridge between them. No amount of description will enable any person to hear any piece of music, and no music can suggest infallibly words to express its meaning. Unless the composer is pleased to give a clue by providing words to go with his notes, as the song writers do or as Beethoven has done to some extent in the sixth and more fully in the ninth symphonies, experiment has shown that different

hearers will put down the most diverse literary interpretations of the same music which they have heard at the same time. The message of music is therefore a message contained in itself. As an art it needs neither poetry, nor morality, nor any other order of experience to support or interpret it. The art of music exists for its own art's sake and must be judged and enjoyed only by the kind of experience appropriate to that art.

This same general rule applies to writing as to music and to every other art, but writing differs from music in that the former is only slightly sensuous, the latter is prevailingly sensuous in its appeal. The use of language, whether spoken or written, implies the sense of hearing, but the significance of language does not lie directly in hearing. Attempts have been made to write poetry as music is written, that is, poetry which conveys the design of the poet merely through sound. Such poems, to the extent to which they are successful, are of course no more translatable into words appealing to the understanding than music is thus translatable. Tone poems in language, if there were any such thing, would really be music and not poetry. But genuine tone poems do not exist except as experiments which show the impossibility of a poem's being two contrary things at one time, at once music and speech. It is of the essence of speech to appeal to the understanding; there must be in it a message addressed to the understanding beyond the sense impression of hearing or it is not speech. Without a message, there can be no language. It is therefore a necessary part of the art of writing that it should raise in the minds of those to whom it is addressed questions which have to do with the thinking side of human nature. Such questions can

be avoided only if one is content to be meaningless. To have meaning at all, writing must have intellectual meaning, and to attempt to ignore this side of writing would be to exclude from the art one of its essential elements. The opposite contention that all writing should be didactic and teach directly a moral lesson is too crudely and openly untrue to call for discussion.

The choice of form is rather a matter of aim than of mood, for different moods might reveal themselves through the same form. Choice of form cannot be left to chance, but it is a necessity calling for a plan and defined intention. The artist does not say, "Here am I, a vessel with sails set ready for any voyage. Come, ye winds of literary inspiration, blow upon me, and I will go wherever ye send me." Rather the artist is both the vessel and the pilot. He knows when he undertakes the adventure of writing whether he expects to land in the haven of an epic poem or of a sonnet. He knows that the style of slippered ease may do for a familiar essay, but he would not expect to start out in this style and to find in the end that he had produced a tragedy. The forms or types of literature have therefore real meaning for the artist in his acceptance of them as among the conditions and limitations under which he labors. Though they have no mandatory significance, though no supreme law-giver has ordained that a sonnet shall have fourteen lines or a play have its unalterable elements of structure, whatever they may be, the types of literature have nevertheless an empirical value that the artist accepts as real. The contention, therefore, of the critics of a certain school that every artistic achievement is a new and independent creation, that types and forms are terms for absolute generalization

which have no meaning for the creative artist, whose concern is with an entirely original and individual artistic experience, is true only in a limited sense and in a sense that has no great significance for the writer as a productive artist. It is indeed of more interest as a theoretical and philosophical distinction than as a principle governing the active exercise of the art of writing. To be sure, the artist does not write to illustrate a type of literature, but he can scarcely write without doing so. Only by inventing entirely new types or forms can he escape the associations which his own mind and the minds of his readers make with old and familiar forms. The invention of new types, however, is as rare as the invention of new words. Every artistic problem is an individual problem, but the solving of it does not imply an utter disregard of all artistic traditions. Variations upon the accepted forms may be made, as a play may have five acts, or three acts, or one act, yet still remain a play. The problem of the artist is not continually to invent new forms, unheard of and unimagined before, but quite as justifiably to work within the limits of the familiar, to accept a certain amount of constraint on the side of tradition, and, thus bounded, to realize nevertheless an individual aim in style through the management of technical detail.

XXVI

DICTION

AGONIZING over words is part of the normal experience of persons who aspire to become writers. Youth is beset by all manner of growing pains, and the experimentations and searchings of the young writer in the use of words is the accompaniment of his endeavor to find his proper place in his intellectual world. Words are the symbols of the ideas out of which ultimately he will create for himself a harmonious universe. But the stage of creation is a time of storm and stress. Very often the struggle is complicated by the fact that the young writer proposes for himself an achievement which is possible neither for him nor for any other man. In the fluctuations and uncertainties of his time of growth, what the young writer desires above all is stability and certainty. He yearns to fix this fleeting world, to find the symbols which shall express it for once and for all. Since his world is mainly a world of sensuous experience, most ardently he seeks to find words that will transfer to another the vividness of reality in sensuous experiences of his own. Hence the fondness of young writers for Spring poetry and for descriptions of nature. The young writer sees himself in a situation, at night, lying on the warm grass on a hillside. Below are the lights of a city, caught through the fringing boughs and tall stems of a grove of eucalyptus trees. The sharp odor of the eucalyptus fills the air, and the wind sets the long branches swinging. How keenly he sees and hears

and feels all this, and how eager he is to get it all down in the precise words that will fix the moment forever and that will enable others to see and hear and feel all that he does. Yet how vain is all his endeavor! He who had never seen a eucalyptus tree could not be made to see one by any description, except as he constructed from hints a picture of his own — a picture that would fill with dismay the young writer who thought he had expressed in words the essence of a eucalyptus tree. Words cannot create realities, and at the best they can barely suggest them. They can suggest moods more successfully than they can reproduce things. Moods are much the same for all people and are not very numerous, but the combinations of forms in the natural world are infinite in number. The first sad lesson the young writer must learn is that the world of words and the world of things are two separate worlds, and that there is no direct line of communication between them. Since the world of words is the only one upon which he can exert any control, it is upon this world that he is thrown back more and more, there to labor and sweat until out of confusion he shall have assembled a sufficient number of words of his own to shadow forth to his satisfaction and, as he hopes, to the satisfaction of some few others, the thoughts that are in him.

Inadequate though they are, words are the necessary rough materials for all expression in language, as musical tones are the necessary materials in compositions for piano or violin. But words, even in the rough, are far from being all alike in their qualities and values. In one aspect, words are merely vehicles for the conveying of information. They name objects, actions, attributes,

all the facts of thinking and doing that can enter into experience. They are thus the symbols of knowledge. But the fact itself is often less important than the particular light in which the fact is viewed. To use words correctly with a clear realization of their general meanings is an evidence of familiarity with the simple proprieties of the language. To use words powerfully, with a realization of their subtle and changing values in particular relations and for particular effects beyond mere intelligibility is an evidence of the presence of style or power in the use of the language. Bassanio's "Night's candles are almost burnt out," and the remark of a casual watcher in the night, "It is almost day," on the side of fact or information may be said to express the same thing. On the side of power, however, the two sets of words are as far apart as black from white.

It is to words of this second kind, to words of power, that the term diction ordinarily applies. The colorless words of a writer's vocabulary, those words naming matters of fact which all readers understand unhesitatingly and in the same way, though they may be the most numerous, are not the most important from the point of view of style. The term "diction" applies to that smaller part of a writer's vocabulary which is weighted with special intention, which reveals not merely what facts the author is talking about, but also the light in which he would have these facts regarded. The number of words which thus become representatively significant in an author's writing varies greatly in different kinds of styles and also at different moments in the author's own writing. Some writers strive for a rich style, for a diction sparkling with as many jewels as the setting will carry. Others cultivate

a chaste and restrained style, the significant word when it occurs illuminating a whole passage by its single radiance. But no matter how many significant words a writer may enrich his writing with, these words must always be placed in a setting of the common uses of the language. Every man has arms and legs and hands and feet, and every man also is a participant in the great structural body of the language. The most expert stylist cannot make the common terms of the language, articles, prepositions, simple verbs and nouns, always different in his use from the use of these words in the plainest, everyday speech. Style is not an alchemy which transmutes every word of baser metal into one of gold. If it seems to do so, the reason is that the gleam from the genuinely golden words so completely fills the eye that all the other parts of the author's diction become indifferent, or are assumed to be coined from the same precious material. Rhythm and general tone therefore often have as much to do with determining the feeling for words as the meanings of the words themselves.

Words standing alone cannot have determinable stylistic values, because words by themselves cannot have rhythm, nor can they express an idea in relation to other ideas. Their intellectual content may be ample, but it must be general until the words are put into a context which gives them immediate meaning. The problem of style, therefore, so far as words are concerned, does consist in part in finding the right word for the right place, in finding the general word which under a definite set of circumstances may most appropriately be given a precise meaning. Correctness is undoubtedly the first demand in the use of words, but after correctness, effectiveness must also be

considered, and effectiveness in the end is a more important consideration than correctness. To use words with a realization of their general meanings is indeed merely an elementary necessity in writing, too elementary to be regarded as a notable achievement. Effectiveness on the contrary calls for all the skill, all the sympathy, a writer can bring to bear in the exercise of his art.

Correctness in the use of words is determined by their traditional and generally accepted meanings and by their syntactical relations to other words. Violations of correctness in this latter respect are usually due to carelessness or are merely blunders. Only the immature or inexperienced writer is likely to commit errors in grammar, and it is therefore well to be sure of one's case before one brings a charge of violation of grammatical law against a writer of standing. What seems to be unlawful grammar, may be so only from a dogmatic and purist point of view which is blind to the author's intention. It was once a favorite pastime to find errors in the writings of Pope, Addison, Steele, and other classics of English literature. Perhaps these writers would have changed some of the things charged against them if their attention had been called to them — for they too might then have turned purists — but in the main the 'errors' are forms of language which left no doubt as to their meanings and which any cultivated speaker of the period might have used, not by special license, but as settled habits in speech. Who has the greater right to determine what shall be correct, a writer who by his practice employs words in the give and take of living speech, or the critic who from the seclusion of his study distributes praise and blame after the event? The fashion of verbal criticism started by

Bishop Lowth has been followed by many others, and any writer who has written abundantly will almost certainly lay himself open to the jibes of the purist who on the basis of the standards of correctness which he first establishes, sets out to discover improprieties of expression in the pages of his victim.

The demands of correctness in the general meanings of words are satisfied when words are used according to their traditional or 'dictionary' values — always of course with due regard to the obvious requirements of the immediate phrase in which each word occurs. It is an error which the dictionary quickly corrects to suppose that words have any absolute meanings. Even the simplest words, as elements in living speech, have meaning only as they are related to other words in a context, that is, as they apply to a situation. The dictionary must be used with discretion, therefore, since the dictionary, though it may give you a dozen different meanings for *tree*, *do*, *put*, and other words, cannot possibly foresee the particular moment at which you may want to use one of these words. Undoubtedly it would be a great convenience in the interests of precision if words always had a single and unequivocal value. Perhaps the nearest the language ever approaches to an absolute meaning in a word is in the names of objects which have received a scientific definition. Thus *hydrogen* names a substance which presumably can call to the mind only a single meaning, and which would name the same substance under whatever circumstances we spoke or wrote of it. Science has had to invent a technical vocabulary of its own to express ideas of this kind, a vocabulary which is not that either of current speech or of literature. The word *water* is therefore not a scientific term, for it may

stand for a variety of ideas and usually some qualification must be added to the word, fresh water, salt water, smooth water, high or low water, a diamond of the first water, before the word can become definitely significant. The choice in words even for correctness consequently always rests upon a special decision. Whether one should speak of the place where one lives as a house, a home, a residence, a domicile, a habitation, a diggings, depends upon decisions which can be made only when the circumstances are known.

But though questions of vocabulary are always questions of the values of words in specific situations, the writer as he grows in experience is nevertheless required to settle for himself a certain number of elementary decisions with respect to general aim and choice of words. One of these is the question of tone, that is, just to what extent writing shall be colloquial and informal, to what extent it shall be literary and conventional. Shall one use colloquial contractions, like *won't, shan't, isn't, they'll, there's,* and the many more like these of which the language is capable, in any form of connected written discourse, or will one permit such contractions only in conversation? Is the ideal vocabulary of literature one which is as near as possible to the language of speech, or should literature have a special technical, or professional, or class vocabulary of its own?

The answer to these questions obviously depends very much on the particular level of literary style which one resolves to cultivate. But even the most informal literary style, it may safely be said, must be something more than a phonographic reproduction of the manner of casual colloquial conversation. Speech itself, it is true, may by cultivation become literary, but to bring it to this condi-

tion, certain processes of selection and organization more properly belonging to writing must be applied to it. Even the conversation in a novel cannot give merely the exact words and style of what might be called natural conversation. It must be suggestive rather than photographic, must free itself from too great a burden of interpretation of colloquial and dialect terms. The writer gives only enough of these to preserve the flavor of his conversation, not so many that the reader's attention is distracted into wonder at the fidelity of the author's observation. It is no merit in realistic writing to be more realistic than the occasion demands.

Though a familiar and easy style may be more colloquial than a serious or impassioned style, no literary style can be merely conversational. The single fact that conversation takes place among two or more persons actually present in the body, whereas literary composition is a solitary occupation carried on with the constructive aid of the imagination, is enough to distinguish the two. In the latter one summons up one's powers and bids them work under direction, and when the will to continue slackens, the work ceases. In the former each participant bears only his proportionate share of the burden and is also continually supported by the demand which the other speakers in the conversation make upon him. One must recognize therefore that the linguistic conditions in literature are different from those in speech, that the former by its nature tends to become more conscious, more reflective and selective than the latter. These differences are summed up in the statement that literature is more formal than speech. But it is so not merely by accident or by intention but by necessity.

A classic critical discussion of this aspect of style is contained in Wordsworth's Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1800, and Coleridge's comments on the Preface in the seventeenth chapter of his *Biographia Literaria*. Wordsworth avowed his purpose to be to relate or describe "incidents and situations from common life," throwing over them "a certain colouring of the imagination," and to do this "as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men." This language of men he confesses, however, to have "purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust."

Now as the situations and incidents of many of Wordsworth's poems were taken from very simple life, the life of shepherds and rustics, it is apparent that the purified language in which they are written and in which we now have them, must be something very different from the language really used by uneducated shepherds and rustics. Coleridge lays bare the fallacy of Wordsworth's theory when he says that "a rustic's language, purified from all provincialism and grossness, and so far reconstructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar . . . will not differ from the language of any other man of common sense, however learned or refined he may be, except as for the notions, which the rustic has to convey, are fewer and more indiscriminate." What Wordsworth calls purification is merely the artist's selection and rejection of detail for the purpose of securing first correctness and secondly, effectiveness in expression. The real language of men concerns him only in so far as it helps him to attain the end in view which as an artist he must keep continually

before him and by which he shall know what to retain and what to reject.

Yet it is manifestly no merit in writing to be so different from the speech of real men that the differences are continually thrust upon the reader's attention. This cautionary rule, if it needed any support beyond common sense, would find it in the writings of those word-mongers who ransack the dictionary for strange and learned words to express ideas not at all remarkable for newness or subtlety. Playing with words is a form of literary trifling. A word which one has recently acquired may seem highly expressive merely because it is unfamiliar, but the glitter of such words soon wears off. Words must be carefully sought to express the ideas for which they stand, yet if they are remotely sought and are dragged in to astonish rather than to please and inform, they are the words of a pedant, not of an artist. It is a good old piece of advice to the writer to think the thoughts of wise men but to use the words of the common people. A writer who begins to gloat over his words, to sentimentalize over them as symbols of peculiarly intimate and rich meaning, has reached a point at which he should pause and reflect that the gratification of any such private satisfaction is dearly purchased if his own pleasure is not shared by others.

The consideration of the language of literature as contrasted with the language of daily speech cannot be dismissed without some attention to the language of poetry as compared with the language of prose. Should poetry have a diction peculiar to itself? Now manifestly in so far as poetry has a mood, has ideas and feelings different from those of prose, it must have certain elements in its vocabulary which make it possible to express them.

Poetry can be written only in the language of poetry, and prose in the language of prose. But this statement, though true enough, does not really touch the question involved, which is not whether poetry should employ an appropriate vocabulary, but whether it should use words which are peculiar to itself and which therefore do not belong either to the common language or to the language of literary prose, but only to the special technical language of poetry. Such a language might be used in poetry for either of two reasons, to satisfy the metrical exigencies of the verse in which poetry is usually written, or to express more effectively the distinctive quality which makes poetry different from prose. But an exacting taste will scarcely condone departures from the common idiom because they render the mechanical manipulation of the verse more easy. When in need of an extra syllable, poets very often have used an infinitive with *do* or *did*, normally an emphatic form, instead of the unemphatic simple verb which is the general custom of the language. Thus they will say "A little flower I did see," for "I saw a little flower," if it is metrically convenient to do so. Or the archaic forms *telleth*, *singeth* may be used when the dissyllable is metrically useful, but the normal forms *tells*, *sings* when the extra syllable is not needed. The use of such artifices is a plain confession of imperfect technical command. It does violence to the sound principle in language that the forms of language are to be used for the sake of expression, not as fillers in an imperfectly realized mechanism.

But the archaic forms *thou*, *thee*, *thine*, and the appropriate forms of the verb in *-est* and *-eth*, and other traditional devices of poetic diction may be used less mechanically, that is, in ways more truly expressive of the spirit

of poetry, when they are employed because the spirit of poetry seems to demand them. One must again stop to inquire, however, whether poetry really demands this kind of special machinery, whether poetry is a kind of religious experience which can be expressed only in a peculiar sacred dialect. By convention, poetry might very well establish certain usages of this sort. But poets, like all other artists, must continually wage war upon the tyrannical prescriptions of convention. When a poet begins to feel that it is inescapably incumbent upon him to address his lady love as *Thou art the pupil of mine eyne*, when archaisms like *iwis*, *eftsoons*, *in sooth*, *forsooth*, *verily*, *perchance*, seem to him to breathe the very life of poetry, when every flower becomes a *flow'ret*, when *cates*, *boons*, and *guerdons* fill completely his poetic horizon, let him ask himself if poetry may not be expressed as well, perhaps better, in the words that are heard daily from the lips of living men and women. Strange and exotic words cannot in themselves make poetry, for the essence of poetry does not lie in fine words. On the other hand, the true poet can make the simplest and most familiar words of the language expressive of poignant poetic feeling. If that is the higher art which attains its end with the least obtrusive effort, then the poet whose vocabulary is unstrained and natural has greater skill than the one who labors under the weight of a burdensome poetic machinery.

The danger to the student of English diction of a too close adherence to the tone and to the forms of familiar speech is on the whole less insistent than one from the opposite direction. For English style, especially the style of writers in their formative stages, is much less exposed to tendencies toward the reprehensibly easy and

informal than it is to tendencies towards an elaborately literary and even pedantic preciosity. Of the two prevailing habits of English expression, the Johnsonian and the plain blunt English of the Saxon type, the former is peculiarly the possession of cultivators of an artful style. The learned style has become the characteristic style of formal English literature. All serious English writing runs to words in *-osity* and *-ation*. Pomposity, verbosity are the besetting sins of English writing, and the reason why they have become so is that the language has acquired a dangerously easy means for pompous expression. Words like *adscititious*, *tergiversation*, *intrinsically* seem to the scholar so easily explained and so expressive that he often forgets how remote they are from the central and common idiom of the language.

Although it is easy now to separate the threads of which the English language is composed, and indeed often difficult to prevent these threads from separating of themselves, this was not always true. In the beginning the English language was single and uniform in its elements, not divisible into foreign and native, learned or literary and simple or popular halves. The clear partition of the two main elements in the English vocabulary came about as the result of innovations in the early modern period. Before the Conquest no two-fold manner of English expression is to be found. The language of that time, although it contained a small number of Latin words and a still smaller number of Celtic, was in the main homogeneous. Words had their different colors and connotations, as they always will have, some being appropriate to the high style of heroic poetry, others appropriate to the familiar style of everyday discourse, but there was no

central cleavage of the elements of the language into an upper and a lower plane, no high-caste English as distinguished from a popular English. And even in the time of Chaucer this remains true. Beginning a generation or two after the Conquest, French words were introduced in great numbers into the English language, but as they were taken on they became national possessions, not the peculiar property of scholars or literary experimentalists. The general tone of the language of Chaucer is different from the general tone of Cynewulf's language, perhaps we may say it is higher, since the language has become more variously expressive. But it was different and higher because the whole tone of English life had been changed, and Chaucer expressed that life for his day as Cynewulf had done the life of England six centuries earlier.

Soon after the death of Chaucer, however, an entirely new tendency made itself increasingly manifest in the English language. Among its other effects, the Renascence produced a sharper distinction between literary and non-literary styles of expression than had ever existed in England before. As corollary to the Renascence admiration for the literary style, respect for the native idiom declined. National feeling, however, was entirely too strong to permit the utter extinction of English for literary purposes. The only thing to be done was consequently to raise English by improving it to the plane of a literary language, where it might in charitable judgment be supposed to compare not too unfavorably with Greek, Latin, Italian, and French, the preëminently literary languages according to the standards of the times. Thus there was begun a formal campaign on the part of the literary enthusiasts to enrich, to enlarge, and to elevate

the English language by the simple process of imposing upon it an upper layer of ornament borrowed from more fortunate languages.

Among these early theorists many whom our present generation holds insufferably dull were regarded with high esteem. Eloquence of the new type often concealed and atoned for a plentiful lack of matter. A bad poet like Lydgate for his high style came to be regarded as the equal of Chaucer. Style became in itself the test of good writing. The cultivation of fine writing developed into a fashionable game, which the literary artificers of the time played to its limit. A kind of verbal intoxication seems to have been in the air and few except conscious reactionaries escaped the infection. It attacked both prose and verse, Lydgate and Caxton being typical representatives. A 'fair term' was to Caxton fair game, and anything that pleased him in French or Latin, the only cultivated languages which he seems to have known, he transplanted bodily into English. When complaint was made to him that some readers found his ornate English hard to read, he answered that his writing was not for an uplandish man to labor in, and that if anyone found his English hard, he should go to Vergil and learn more Latin, after which he might be able to return to English.

The high-handed methods of these literary virtuosi naturally aroused some opposition, but until the standards of taste of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began to be formulated, this opposition was of relatively slight effect. Throughout the whole of the Elizabethan period, the passion for fine style raged unabated. Inkhornism provided abundant materials for the wit combats and quarrels which characterize the times, but hostile as well

as favoring critics are equally given to pernicious practices. One of the most illuminating of these quarrels is that between Gabriel Harvey and Thomas Nashe. The latter frankly avowed his preference for "huge words." He cares nothing, he says, for a mixed wine, "this mediocre genius," but prefers pure wine and one that heats the brain thoroughly. As a sample of this pure wine we may decant one sentence from his amazing performance, *Nashe's Lenten Stuff*, a sizable volume entirely devoted to praise of the Yarmouth red herring:

"But how Yarmouth, of itself so innumerable populous and replenished and in so barren a plot seated, should not only supply the inhabitants with plentiful purveyance of sustenance, but provant and victual moreover this monstrous army of strangers, was a matter that egregiously bepuzzled and entranced my apprehension."

Reduced to plain English, this merely means that Nashe found it hard to understand how the people of Yarmouth made a living.

It would be easy to show that scarcely a writer of the whole Elizabethan period escaped this love of the high style, "of foot and half-foot words," as Ben Jonson called them. Shakspere, himself, although he saw the verbal extravagances of his time clearly enough to satirize them in Holofernes, Osric, and other characters, was not able to avoid the absurdities which he holds up to ridicule. The plain soldier, Michael Williams, says that to disobey the king "were against all proportion of subjection." And Falstaff, without humorous intent, expresses the simple idea of Like master, like man, by saying that Justice Shallow and his servants are "so married in con-

junction by the participation of society, that they flock together in consent, like so many wild geese."

Thus it was that the big word and the feeling for the big word entered the English language. It came, one may say, in the childhood of the English literary language. As an evidence of the exuberance of childhood one may perhaps look upon it forgivingly, but a mature literary taste should certainly have outgrown it. Later times have added occasionally to the store of big words which the Renascence theorists provided, especially in scientific and technical subjects, but so thoroughly and completely was the work of enlarging and elevating done by the Renascence innovators, that it has not often been necessary to supplement their efforts. Indeed, the main endeavor since the close of the Elizabethan age has been to limit the use of the big word. When one examines the writings of the more extreme Elizabethan stylists, one is surprised first of all to find how many of their new words have persisted in the language, and afterwards equally surprised to find how many which would seem to have had as good a chance of surviving, have perished.

It should be observed, however, that the impression of bigness in these long-tailed words does not arise merely, or even mainly, from the physical length of the words. This feeling for the big word as contrasted with the simple word does not exist in the English of the period before the Conquest, as has been pointed out, and yet the average physical length of words and the number of long words is considerably greater in Old English than it is in even the rotund and elevated English of the modern period. In a representative passage in *Beowulf* containing one hundred words, thirty-one are monosyllabic, forty-five

are dissyllabic, nineteen are trisyllabic, and five are quadrisyllabic. In a passage of similar length at the opening of *Paradise Lost*, seventy-five are monosyllabic, nineteen are dissyllabic, five are trisyllabic, and only one contains four syllables. A comparison between Chaucer and Tennyson reveals almost the same proportions. In a passage of one hundred words taken from the beginning of Chaucer's *Prologue*, fifty-nine are monosyllables, thirty-two are dissyllables, seven are trisyllables, and two are quadrisyllables. In the opening one hundred words of Tennyson's *Morte D'Arthur*, seventy-nine are of one syllable, seventeen of two, and four of three. Of the three syllable words, three are proper names, Bedivere twice, and Lyoness. The fourth trisyllabic word is the compound *uplifted*. Tennyson's words are thus seen to be practically all monosyllables and dissyllables. This proportion is not greatly changed when one examines English writing in the more artificial style. In William Hamilton of Bangor's soliloquy in imitation of Hamlet, which begins "My anxious soul is tore with doubtful strife," the final absurdity of the high style, we find among the first one hundred words, seventy-one of one syllable, twenty-one of two, five of three, and three of four. In Dr. Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*, the proportions are sixty-six to the hundred of one syllable words, thirty-one of two syllables, two of three, and one of four. It is apparent, therefore, that the words of the Modern English poetic vocabulary are prevailingly of one or two syllables, and that longer words occur much less numerously than they do in the literature of the language before it was elevated. It is instructive to compare the vocabulary of modern German, which has remained almost exclusively Teutonic,

with the vocabulary of English in this respect. The proportions of the words in Goethe's *Faust* for a typical passage are fifty-six of one syllable, thirty-one of two, ten of three, and three of four syllables. The numbers for Goethe agree almost exactly with the numbers for Chaucer. Obviously the large number of monosyllables and dissyllables in Modern English as compared with German and Old and Middle English is due to the fact that English has lost practically all of its inflectional endings.

It is true that certain kinds of English prose will show a greater number of polysyllables than will normally be found in English poetry. But prose naturally runs to greater extremes than verse, and for the purpose of determining the character of the central, permanent feeling for the standard English idiom, verse affords a surer test than prose. The language of scientific and intellectual prose is a highly specialized form of expression which has developed apart from the average feeling for the language. Even in prose, however, the words of one and two syllables form the body and background of the language. In the twenty-third Psalm, the percentages are seventy-six for monosyllabic words, nineteen for dissyllabic and five for trisyllabic. In Macaulay and Carlyle the polysyllables are more numerous. A typical passage from Macaulay's *History of England* shows sixty-three monosyllables to the hundred, eighteen dissyllables, fourteen trisyllables, two words of four and five syllables each, and one of six. The opening of Chapter VII of *Sartor Resartus* has sixty-seven words of one syllable, twenty of two, eight of three, four of four, and one of six. The main conclusions to be drawn from these statistics are that Modern English contains no greater proportion of polysyllabic words than the lan-

guage contained before it was elevated, but that, secondly, the polysyllable contrasts more violently with the Modern English short words than was the case in the earlier stages of the language.

The feeling for the big word in English is thus seen to be not merely a matter of its physical constitution, of the number of letters it contains. The origins of this feeling are more deeply seated in the psychology of the big word, especially in a certain pomposity of association and in a vagueness of meaning attaching to the big word. Clear definition of the meaning of a word is one of the most effectual ways of reducing its bigness. In recent times many long scientific terms, together with the things they name, such as *telephone*, *telegraph*, *aviator*, *automobile* and countless more, have become so familiar that they are as directly intelligible in the language as any word with a thousand years' pedigree. The word *indefensible* does not seem big because habit has taken away from it any sense of vagueness, and in the same way the word *ichthyosaurus*, of precisely the same number of letters and syllables, would shrink considerably if it ever came into familiar daily use. Naturally this feeling for the size of words varies greatly in accordance with the training and experience of different individuals. The word *familiar*, which has just been used, has acquired, in its most popular sense, practically the meaning *impertinent*. The meaning *customary* or *informal* would seem to the popular speaker a higher use of the word, and still more remote would be the use of the phrase *familiar relations* in the sense of the relations of the family. It is this quality of quick recognition, of directness of meaning, which gives its special character to the native Teutonic elements of the vocabu-

lary. Native words are likely to be the ones used in the most frequently recurring needs for expression and therefore the words which will acquire meanings that have no penumbra, no halo of hazy suggestion about them. This appears when one compares two words of the same logical content, the one an immediately self-defining word, the other a word of less direct signification. Thus *saline* seems a 'bigger' word than *salty*, *raucous* than *husky*, *stipend* than *wages*, *oblivious* than *forgetful*, *hydrometer* than *water meter*, *empyrean* than *heavenly*, *stellar* than *starry*, *morose* than *gloomy*, *cyclical* than *circular*, *dubiety* than *doubtfulness*, and so with hundreds of other words. The word of relatively vague intellectual content seems to bulk larger than the word of definite content. Herein manifestly lies the danger in the use of the big word, the danger that the writer will trick himself into thinking that he is adding distinction and profundity to his thought when he is only hiding it behind the mist of obscured meaning. It is easy for a writer to convince himself that he knows the meanings of words which have become established in his memory, but the writer who is thoroughly honest with himself will often pause to ask if he has a genuinely intelligent understanding of some big word which he is tempted to use. "I defy the greatest divine to produce any law, either of God or man," says Swift,[1] "which obliges me to comprehend the meaning of *omniscience*, *omnipresence*, *ubiquity*, *attribute*, *beatific vision*, with a thousand others so frequent in pulpits, any more than that of *eccentric*, *idiosyncracy*, *entity*, and the like."

A convenient way of testing whether one has a definite understanding of an elaborate word is to translate the

[1] Letter to a Young Clergyman, Works, ed. Scott, Vol. VIII, p. 200.

word into simple language, observing whether in the process it has lost any of its content. Does *congregate* mean anything more than *crowd together*, *commiserate* than *feel sorry for*, *meticulous* than *careful about small things*, *impervious* than *impassable?* Does *sternutation* mean more than *snoring*, *nigritude* than *blackness*, *protuberance* than *bump?* The language in many instances possesses a big word which states an idea synthetically, but it also possesses a group of smaller words which express the same idea analytically. The analytic phrase, by the mere fact of the analysis, reduces the apparent bulk of the idea by providing it with sharp outlines. This kind of exercise persisted in is almost sure to result in a preference for the analytic and the clearly defined expression.

When the elevated expression seems to be arbitrarily chosen to avoid a simple expression, the stage of the bombastic and ridiculous is reached. Thus appears the easily over-worked literary device of polysyllabic humor, dear to Dickens, Lamb, and many another, as for example, calling a red nose a sanguinary proboscis, or a man an individual or a human biped, a house a domiciliary abode. Less extreme forms of this contrast appear constantly in the daily use of the language. A man gives ten cents to a beggar, but he makes a donation when the amount of a gift is larger. The beggar asks alms for himself, but the collector for charity solicits subscriptions. A house or barn or railway station is built, but a church is an edifice and is erected. The workman pays his bills, but the master settles his accounts. The public speaker makes a speech or addresses an audience, according to his sense of the importance of the occasion. In unnumbered ways we are constantly making such distinctions of values, and

by the forms of expression more or less consciously lifting ourselves to a dignified plane by avoiding the familiar. That the dignity of the expression is often purely formal and is attained by avoiding the familiar without reference to the appropriateness of the expression is a thought that provides the medicine for this disease.

The proof that power in the use of words does not lie merely in their bigness does not carry with it, however, the demonstration of the true source of power in words. Avoidance of false distinctions of style does not assure the acquirement of genuine distinction, for style is not a negative but a positive quality. The truth is that in the end, even in the study of the word, one is driven back to consider the character of the writer, his sincerity, his originality, his profundity, his sympathy, in short, the man himself. Words must always be echoes, and beyond the words, one must perceive their source and inspiration. A writer therefore necessarily chooses his words when he establishes his habits of thought and of feeling. His words are the garments which bewray what life he has led. They are dynamic when his character is dynamic. The power of words is to be measured by their power of intellectual and emotional displacement in the experience of the persons into whose inner life they enter. They may be simple words themselves, but if the mind of the artist puts into them a great content, the words thereby become great. They become words of power. Mere appropriateness in the use of words cannot therefore in itself insure distinction of style. The problem of a distinguished style does not lie simply in the task of finding proper words for proper places, for this task may be satisfactorily performed in an undistinguished style. A plain, matter of

fact mind may express itself plainly and appropriately without achieving writing of literary significance. Proper words in proper places good style must have, but in the end the secret of a good style does not lie in the manipulation of a mechanical art. It lies darkly hidden within the far recesses of the human soul. For after all, words are dead things until some living mind breathes the breath of life into them.

Even perfect styles differ widely in the character of the words by which they produce their effects, and, on the whole, it seems relatively easier to hit upon the precisely right word for the right place in some styles than in others. In general, it may be said that writing which is addressed simply and directly to the intelligence finds its proper words more readily than writing which appeals to vaguer emotions and to the associations of ideas. This is true because the mark at which the intellectual writer aims is ordinarily more clearly defined, and it is more clearly defined because language in its past uses has been very much more concerned with expressing clearly an intellectual content than an emotional content. The words in the following passage from Pope's *Essay on Man*, for example, leave no shadow of doubt or hesitation as to their intention:

> Behold the child, by Nature's kindly law,
> Pleas'd with a rattle, tickled with a straw:
> Some livelier play-thing gives his youth delight,
> A little louder, but as empty quite:
> Scarfs, garters, gold amuse his riper stage,
> And beads and pray'r-books are the toys of age:
> Pleas'd with this bauble still, as that before;
> 'Till tir'd he sleeps, and Life's poor play is o'er.

Writing of this kind is a delight, not by reason of the profundity or the great emotional displacement of the thought, but because in it the mechanism of speech works with an absolute precision and certainty of effect. Such writing satisfies completely the rule of proper words in proper places. Yet how different these words are from the significant words in the equally perfect phrasing of Keats' *Ode to a Nightingale:*

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that ofttimes hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

This stanza from Keats is not as clear as the lines from Pope, that is, it is not as clear in the sense that it can be summed up in brief abstract statements. Yet obviously the two kinds of writing cannot be measured by the same standards. The words of the later poet are rich in second intentions, in suggestions and connotations of feeling which cannot be conveyed in the forms of an intellectual abstraction. To look for a transparent intellectual clearness in writing of this kind would be to demand something contrary to the nature of it. Its clearness is of a different order, of an untranslatable quality. Nor can two such different styles as that of Pope and of Keats be related to each other according to a scale of relative excellence. The one poet could not have realized his

intention by using the kinds of words the other has employed. Clearness and appropriateness in the choice of words must always be determined by the end to be achieved. The task of Keats was undoubtedly more difficult than that of Pope, for the reason that Keats was expressing matters of less general and definite experience than Pope. He was aiming at a larger, more distant, less openly visible target than Pope. Yet obviously writing would be too narrowly limited if one insisted that it should always exhibit the hard brilliance of a neat and precise workmanship. The French are fond of the saying that French writing which is not clear is not French. This may be a wise saying, if one interprets the word "clear" broadly enough. But the characteristic virtue of clarity in French writing has been dearly bought if it denies to French writers the privilege of recording those aspects of human experience for the expression of which language as a common social possession has provided no immediately intelligible means. Man's reach should exceed his grasp, and it is possible to be always clear and clear to every one, only by limiting expression to those things that come within the general range. But writers in English have always striven to use words not merely as the records of experiences fully and finally apprehended, but also as symbols of a different kind of significance in which things inexpressible are suggested to minds open to receive them.

The compulsion of finding the right word for the right place is one that rests not only upon the creative artist in his endeavor to phrase things as they have not been phrased before. In its past uses, the language has developed an extraordinarily rich and varied set of forms

with traditional values, and the difficulty of steering one's way in the proper command of these forms often confronts the speaker and writer even in the less exacting conditions of daily speech. Trades and occupations, for example, almost always develop special and somewhat technical forms of expression for special activities. No matter how much one knew about plumbing, if one were not a professional associate of plumbers, by one's speech one would almost certainly be revealed as not a plumber. Realistic writers often cherish these professional and class locutions, seeking with their aid to secure the tone of living speech. Except to the person familiar with the kind of speech to which they belong, such specialized idioms, however, being unknown, are just as likely to produce exactly the opposite effect, unless indeed the reader is willing to take on faith the realist's language as being strange to him but proper and familiar to the characters the realist is describing. The language of persons who have to do with animals is often of this specialized kind. To one who is not a doggy man, any dog is likely to be merely a dog, but the fancier refers to dogs always with specific terms for sex, age, color, and breed. So also in general usage, the term " horse " is applied without discrimination to any animal of this kind, whether it is a stallion, mare, gelding, foal, colt, filly, cob, pony, hunter, or what not. In the language of the professional horseman, however, the word " horse " is too vaguely descriptive to be often useful. Animals in groups are also known traditionally by terms definitely associated with different kinds of animals. Thus sheep in a group are known as a flock, whereas cattle in a group are a herd. It would ordinarily be felt as a crudity to refer to a group of cattle

as a flock or to a group of sheep as a herd, although the person who cares for a flock of sheep is a shepherd who herds the sheep. The word "flock" also applies to groups of birds, crows, ducks, geese, though perhaps a professional chicken raiser would not speak of his flock of chickens, and traditionally one is certainly expected not to say a flock, but a bevy of quails or larks, and a covey of partridges. The smaller winged creatures do not go in flocks but in swarms, as in a swarm of bees, or in nests, as in "to have a nest of hornets about one's head." A colony of ants is also often referred to as a nest. Other similar words for groups, often of animals transferred to persons, occur in such phrases as a pack of wolves — or of fools, a school of fish, a shoal of porpoises, a gang of ruffians, a band of robbers — or brothers, a mob of bargain-hunters, a drove of hogs, a troop of children, a troupe of actors, a horde of office-holders, and many other phrases like these. Some of these words, for example, mob and horde, name groups of individuals and at the same time indicate a definite emotional attitude towards these groups, but for the most part the different words are without distinctive coloring on the side of their connotations.

Logically very little is gained by this variety of terms for indicating a number of objects in groups. The word "herd" would apply as well to sheep as to cattle, and "flock" as well to quails and partridges as to ducks and geese. In the interests of economy it would seem that the language ought to have a single term to designate all the applications of this single idea of objects in groups. The present abundance of forms apparently is a traditional inheritance from that kind of language which is concerned only with specific and individual applications, as in the

speech of those primitive peoples who have no way of referring to tree in general but who must always specify beech or maple or pine or other tree because their language does not provide them with a generalized word for tree. Popular English has indeed taken the step towards a generalized term, and in the slang word *bunch*, it has acquired a general noun for a bunch of cattle, a bunch of crooks, a bunch of money, a bunch of any objects that can be thought of disjunctively and collectively at the same time, all by extension of such locutions as "a bunch of roses," "a bunch of carrots." Does this popular use of *bunch* imply or result in a poverty of thought? And if so, at what moment does this poverty first manifest itself? If it is permissible to speak of bunches of two such different things as carrots and roses, it would seem that the word might readily be extended to other uses without danger of loss. Popular English, in this extension of *bunch*, has been merely following that common tendency in language which strives to bring about a unity of linguistic form to correspond to a unity of logical content. And of course as soon as one passes out of the technical and special applications of these varied terms, they are all likely to have but one clearly perceived logical content, the notion merely of individuals in a group, whether sheep, horses, cattle, wolves, or people. Some of these traditional phrases have become so rare that now they would scarcely be intelligible to the general understanding, and a bevy of larks or of quails belongs only to the language of poetry or antiquarianism, not to the language of current speech. One general principle seems applicable here in determining the extent to which these specialized terms and phrases shall be kept alive and employed. It is the simple princi-

ple of not making language more specific than the occasion demands. When the situation calls for no more definite a term than "horse," it would waste and scatter the reader's energy to compel him to think of the more specialized concept of mare, stallion, or gelding. Doubtless it is a good guiding rule in speech and in writing to strive to be specific and concrete, but the thing can easily be overdone. Specific and concrete expressions are only obstructions when they drag in distinctions and refinements which the situation as a whole does not require. If we cannot go quite so far as to accept in general cultivated use the slang word *bunch*, the reason is not that the word is badly conceived or that it serves its purpose inadequately, but merely that the conventions of cultivated use have not extended the application of this word as freely as popular use has done.

The problem of finding the right word for the right place among the many approximately synonymous terms of English speech is much less vexing in the case of concrete nouns, such as those that have just been discussed, than it is in the choice of words designating moods, feelings, and other notions susceptible of shades and degrees of quality. After all a horse is a horse, and in ordinary circumstances there is not likely to be much difference of opinion on this subject. For this single, unsubtilized concept, a single word ordinarily suffices. But though it is not usually important to distinguish the different kinds of horses, yet, whenever the differentiation of a notion is felt to be important, then words indicating shades of meaning are necessary. Thus the notion of something not large has so many aspects that it may be variously expressed by *little*, *small*, *slight*, *diminutive*, *inconsiderable*,

petty, *petite*, *miniature*, *tiny*, and still other words. Some of these words obviously express differences of degree, *tiny* for example, meaning something smaller than *little*. But on the other hand, it would be difficult to phrase a definition which would discriminate between *little* and *small* in such a way as to enable one to know just when to use *little* and when to use *small*. In some situations the words can be used interchangeably, though by no means in all. The word *little* often has a shade of affection or approval in its uses not contained in the uses of the word *small*. A house might be described as "a pretty, little house," but not as "a pretty, small house." This is just the kind of distinction which is likely to seem important in the use of English speech as a medium of communication in modern cultivated intercourse, and for the expressing of such distinctions, the sensitive speaker and writer cherishes all the possibilities of the language. It is in such words that much of his feeling for idiom resides. He may be content to forget that quails and larks go in bevies, that a farmer grows fruits, grains, and vegetables, but raises cattle, horses, and swine, except at those rare moments when larks, vegetables, and swine suggest to him the advisability of inquiring into their appropriate terminology, but for the notions and distinctions that are to him of intimate concern, his own experience will lead him to the cultivation of a finely modulated vocabulary.

Vague and undifferentiated expression, it should be added, is not always the result of lack of observation and lack of interest in distinctions. It is not always a mark of the unthinking mind, but may be merely evidence of the possession of an imperfect mechanical equipment in language. When this is so, the corrective is to be found in a direct

study of words. On examination the past uses of the language will very often reveal that others have expressed the very distinctions which you or I may have observed but for which we have not found the proper terms. In the matter of color words, for example, certain related colors are often grouped under broad general designations, not because the observer is blind to shadings of color, but because he has not at hand the proper terms for expressing them. The color red has an infinity of shadings, and though the language does not possess words to designate all the possible variations of red, yet words like *reddish*, *rusty*, *ruddy*, *glowing*, *pink*, *pinkish*, *cardinal*, *crimson*, *coppery*, *coral*, *carroty*, *rosy*, *ruby*, *sandy*, *bricky*, *hectic*, *gory*, *bloody*, *tawny*, *scarlet*, *cherry*, *carmine*, *vermilion*, *rouge*, *florid*, *rubicund*, to mention only some of the obvious possibilities, reveal an extraordinary wealth of terms centering about the general notion of red. So also states of feeling are often lumped under one general term which really does not adequately correspond to the experiences of the person who uses the general term. The simple adjective idea of pleasure, for example, may be expressed in one degree or another by such various terms as *pleasant*, *agreeable*, *glad*, *happy*, *joyful*, *joyous*, *blithe*, *grateful*, *felicitous*, *blissful*, *delightful*, *rapturous*, and others. The study of approximately synonymous words like these has a further value in that they may reveal to the student shades of experience of which he had not hitherto been aware. Words are not ordinarily the best ways of approach to the realities of experience, but words are nevertheless the epitomes of history, and assimilation of past experience is surely among the justifiable methods of adding to immediate personal experience.

XXVII

RHYTHM, MELODY, AND TONE

The aspects of language dependent immediately on perception by the senses make their way into experience chiefly through the ear and are thus appreciated by hearing. But the sense for language may also be muscular, as when one receives a certain sound in a word not merely as in auditory impression, but also feels it in terms of the muscular movements of the organs of speech brought into play in producing the sound. Thus we speak of rolling a word on the tongue, like *gold*, *whole*, and other rich words, which possess the possibility of an actual physical sensation as one of the handles by which we grasp their meaning. So also words are often said to be hissed, though there is no hissing sound in them, when they are pronounced with constriction and narrowing of the lips and firm closure of the teeth. The melodramatic villain always hisses his dire threats, even if his words contain no *f*'s, *s*'s, *z*'s, or *th*'s, the only kinds of sounds that can be hissed. But the villain's hissing is not so much sound as muscular sensation. So words like *war*, *cling*, *twinkle*, *shiver*, *growl*, *gash* — "in a gash of the wind-grieved Apennine" — and innumerable others which the poets, actors and orators love to pronounce trippingly, mouthingly, rollingly, liquidly, and otherwise muscularly, all are felt as much as they are heard. Certain sounds are sometimes felt to be less pleasing than others, and among the vowels, for example, the sound contained in the word *awe*

and the flat *a* of *bad, sad, glad,* and other words, are less liked than other vowels. This dislike of these two sounds can scarcely come from the auditory impressions made by the sounds, or from any connotation of meaning in the sounds. The more probable supposition is that certain muscular sensations are more pleasing than others, and that among the less pleasing are the sensations attending the production of the vowel of *awe* and the vowel of *bad.* It is very easy to over-pronounce, that is, to exaggerate sounds of this kind for rhetorical purposes, and of course a tendency is always present to replace the sounds made by the less pleasing muscular movements by other sounds which do not suffer from these disqualifications.

Perhaps too little attention is paid to these muscular associations of words in the study of style. The orator and the poet, who think of their compositions as works to be spoken, cannot fail to realize the importance of this element in the expressive use of language, but even in silent reading it likewise plays a part. Instinctively the reader either hears an interior voice in silent reading, or less commonly and consciously, he produces in a rudimentary way the motions by which the sounds are made. Or one may do both at the same time. But though these muscular impressions of speech are important parts of its sensuous content, they are nevertheless not organized into patterns and sequences to produce the effects of rhythm. The sense for rhythm in speech is not based upon muscular sensations in the organs of speech, but upon the perception of the sounds which these muscular activities bring forth. In time it may come to be so, when poets are more systematically aware of the physical actions present in the production of speech.

Though reading moments are doubtless much more numerous than speaking moments in the life of every person who concerns himself with questions of style, or at least when he concerns himself with questions of style, nevertheless the visual sensations of reading likewise play almost no part in the appreciation of qualities of rhythmical style. Kinds of type used in printing, the arrangement of text on the page, for example poetry printed in short lines with wide margins and prose in full lines, these may perhaps be said to have some slight stylistic significance. Verse printed uninterruptedly may be made ludicrous, or prose printed as verse. A sprinkling of capital letters, as on a page of Carlyle, may produce a certain stylistic effect of strangeness, quaintness, or what not. It will usually be found, however, that these departures from mechanical convention are indications for a different manner of reading, that they are significant not merely for the eye but for the ear as well. Carlyle's capitals, for example, often serve for emphasis and thus have an intellectual as well as a sensuous value. And verse written as prose is usually read with so little attention to line divisions as to produce a grotesque mingling or contrast of verse and prose effects. Italics, underscoring, dots, and dashes are signals for interpretative reading, not mere ornaments for the eye.

The purely sensuous appeals of style through the ear may be grouped under the heads of rhythm, melody, and tone. The basis of all rhythm is time, of all melody is pitch, of all tone is the physical constitution and configuration of the sound-producing instrument, whether the vocal mechanism in its various possible shapings, or violin, flute, horn, or other organ for producing sound. Tone

includes what is often called sound-color, the quality of the vowel of *gold*, for example, as compared with the vowel of *steel*. It includes also timbre, the quality in voice which makes even what we call the same sound different when spoken by two different persons. Melody is the antithesis to monotone and is produced by the rising and falling of the voice in a related group of sounds.

The first postulate in the study of rhythm as an element in style must be that all persons are not equally sensitive to rhythmical effects. Some have a keen appreciation of rhythmical combinations, and at the other extreme some are almost without the sense of rhythm. For the aggressively rhythmical person, every group of sounds not so far apart that they break the sense of succession or so close together that they cannot be separately appreciated can be and is organized as a rhythmical sequence. Perhaps no normally healthy person is entirely without a sense of rhythm. A limerick, or a hymn tune, or the beating of a drum will scarcely be beyond the appreciation of the most rudimentary rhythmical sense. Rhythm in some degree may be said therefore to be a common possession. It is in the nature of all language to be rhythmical, and speech which is not rhythmical, for example, the language of hysteria or intense excitement, is abnormal.

Before entering upon any project in writing, the artist must first choose whether he will write prose or poetry. The differences between these two styles of writing are many, but certainly one of the most important is rhythm. Prose has its appropriate rhythms, and so also has poetry, though this is not the same thing as saying that poetry must be written in the regular meters of verse. But to

make English poetry and prose the same thing runs counter to all literary tradition and experience. Sidney maintained in his *Apology for Poetry* that Xenophon, though he wrote his account of Cyrus in prose, gave us therein "an absolute heroicall Poem," and in his own prose romance *Arcadia*, Sidney apparently considered himself as having played the part of a poet. Among other poets and critics, Shelley has defended the same position, that poetry is not dependent upon form. The distinction between poets and prose writers in his *Defense of Poetry* he calls a "vulgar error." Lord Bacon he declares was a poet and Bacon's language, Shelley thinks, "has a sweet and majestic rhythm which satisfies the sense no less than the almost superhuman wisdom of his philosophy satisfies the intellect." John Stuart Mill declared that "whosoever writes but truly any human feeling writes poetry." [1]

With such definitions as these of Sidney, Shelley, and others, there is really no need to quarrel. Noble thoughts nobly expressed may be called poetry, and in common usage the word may have even a wider meaning, as when one speaks of a depressing experience as taking the poetry out of life, or of the poetry of the curves in a piece of statuary. As thus used, however, the word "poetry" characterizes merely a general mental and emotional state, but it does not name the particular achievements of poets in the forms of their art. The word has a more exact and technical meaning as applied to the art of writing. Just as one may have philosophical moments of reflection upon life without being a philosopher, so one may have poetical moods without being a poet. To be a poet, in the prag-

[1] *English Essays*, p. 414.

matic sense of the word, a writer must express the matter of poetry in such forms as the world at large regards as appropriate. And though one may grant that, even in form, the transition stages between prose and poetry are gradual and that there may be a point where a critic might indifferently call a passage poetry or prose, yet in the main, both in intention and performance, a poetical achievement is clearly distinguishable from one in prose. The important distinction between poetry and prose lies not in theory, but in the necessity of recognizing the facts of literary experience.

We are now ready to ask the question in what respects the rhythm of poetry ought to differ from the rhythm of prose in order not to do violence to expectation and to the accepted feeling for the individuality of the two forms. Must poetry be written in verse to deserve the name of poetry? But this question merely resolves itself into the further question of the difference between the rhythm of prose and the rhythm of verse. Fundamentally rhythm is the same, whatever the physical form of its expression. It may be expressed not only through sound, but in other ways, as for example by pressing the finger against some other part of the body or some external substance, or by opening and closing the eyes, at more or less regular intervals. We may thus have sound rhythm, pressure rhythm, or sight rhythm. Always, however, the essential characteristic of rhythm is the recurrence in certain time relations of a series of sense impressions.

The simplest form of rhythm is that which results from a succession of sense impressions of the same kind at the same intervals of time, as, for example, tapping the index finger on the table a number of times. This may be

called unitary rhythm, and it runs through all human experience. Its origins probably lie in the physical constitution of the human body, in the beating of the heart, in breathing, or possibly in the rise and fall of the foot in walking. But whatever the origin of the sense of rhythm, the element of time as applied to a sequence of sense impressions is the determining element in it. Human nature, however, is not usually satisfied with the rhythm of these simplest elements resulting from a succession of unitary pulses of the same kind and at the same intervals of time. Upon it one commonly imposes a secondary rhythm, producing regularly recurring groups of unitary pulses. Thus the ticking of a clock is unconsciously broken up, usually into groups of two, though it is easy to impose other groupings, as the musician does in using a metronome, upon what is really a succession of ungrouped sounds. By the side of unitary rhythm we then have secondary or group rhythms.

In the rhythm of the English language the sense impressions are of course the sound of the voice speaking the language. By a special effort these sounds may be made to succeed one another as unit pulses at regular intervals and without differentiation of any kind. But though the sounds of the language may be pronounced so, the result would not be a kind of English permissible in any recognized type of expression. The simplest forms of unitary rhythm, like the monotonous beating of a drum, does not occur in any extended passage of speech. It may perhaps be heard in short passages of intense excitement or suffering, when sensation is paralyzed and speech, as we say, is lifeless. Or perhaps an example of it occurs in Milton's line,

"Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death."

But this line is a curiosity and a puzzle. No one knows just how it should be read and this means that it has no normal reading. In the English language, variation in accent plays a necessary part. Speech which is not accentual is not English. From its very nature therefore English rhythm cannot be merely a rhythm of undifferentiated unitary pulses. The unitary pulses are at the base of all rhythmical experiences, but imposed upon them in English speech must always be the further distinction of stress or accent producing groups.

This gives the clue to the real difference between the rhythm of prose and the rhythm of verse. In the rhythm of verse the unitary pulse and the customary accent in the word tend to fall together, producing thus, as the characteristic of verse, an approximately regular coincidence between stress and rhythmic beat in the formation of secondary rhythmical groups. This coincidence is not always perfect, absolute regularity, even in verse, being not a necessary or indeed admirable quality. But whereas this coincidence is the prevailing characteristic of verse in the formation of the secondary rhythmical groups, the opposite is true of prose. The unitary pulse and the customary stress in words may and frequently do coincide in prose, but more likely the succession of the unitary rhythmical pulses will be carried along without close dependence on word stress, the syllables, stressed and unstressed, being fitted into relation to these rhythmic beats by a complicated process of syncopation and other equivalences. So far as the relation of stressed syllables and unitary pulse is concerned, the primary characteristic of verse is its approximately complete satisfying

of expectation, the primary characteristic of prose is its continual surprise, the continual demand for adaptation and arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables to fit into the underlying rhythmical current.

Now coincidence, such as one finds in verse, can result only from choice and selection, especially if it is maintained, as it must be in verse, as the prevailing characteristic of the composition. Perhaps therefore the shortest definition one can give of the rhythm of verse as compared with the rhythm of prose is that the language of the former is primarily manipulated and regulated, whereas the language of prose exhibits the lack of systematic plan and the naturalness of uncontrolled speech.

It is not quite true, however, to say that the language of verse is unnatural and that the language of prose is natural. Certainly one may take quite as much thought in establishing the rhythms of prose as of verse, and, on the other hand, the sing-song of verse, present even in the most primitive speech, cannot be called unnatural. Yet in a qualified sense it is permissible to speak of the unregulated rhythms of prose as being more natural than the regulated rhythms of verse. In prose, words must accommodate themselves to the rhythm of the passage in which they occur as best they may. The first consideration in the use of prose is the conveying of the logical content of language, and all other considerations must yield to this. In thus putting meaning before everything else, prose gives the main place to the essential reason for which fully developed language exists. Verse on the other hand puts content merely on a level with rhythm, often even sacrifices meaning for rhythm, thus elevating an accident of speech above its substance.

The fatal sin in rhythmical style is to confuse these two manners of expression. Prose in which the stressed syllables recur at such regular intervals as to establish an expected coincidence between rhythmic beat and stress is bad prose. On the other hand, it is equally bad in verse to establish such an expectation and then fail to satisfy it. It is perhaps easier to write rhythmically bad prose than rhythmically bad verse, because verse supplies the versifier with a plan which he is not likely to disregard, his main danger being that he will follow his plan monotonously and slavishly. But prose calls for a mind always on the alert. One cannot find in poetry of equal distinction examples of prose to place beside the blank verse passages in Dickens and Ruskin. For a writer may fall easily from prose into verse when he is lulled asleep by the mere music of language, but the reverse process, of passing from verse to prose, is a rhythmical change much less likely to take place.

The rhythmical groupings of a larger kind, like regular line and structural stanza in verse, are rarely found in prose. Their main characteristic is again regularity and repetition, thus begetting and satisfying an expectation. In normal prose style, as in the phrase, the clause, the sentence, and the sequence of sentences and of paragraphs, the larger rhythmical groupings are characterized by diversity rather than regularity. Occasionally for rhetorical purposes, a clause of the same rhythm is added to a preceding clause, especially in a balanced or antithetic style. But a prose style would be intolerable in which the same type of rhythm appeared in phrase or clause or sentence with such regularity that its reappearance became a demand.

Critical opinion is pretty well agreed that prose is bad

if it forgets its own nature and turns its rhythms into those which more properly belong to verse. Prose poetry of various kinds has been written from time to time, but no important monument of English literature can be named, which, if it be prose, is not obviously and distinctly prose. With verse, however, the situation is different. In all periods of English literature works have been written in verse which maintains itself as verse with difficulty and only with the aid of some external support, for example, the manner of printing of the lines on the page, or the use of capital letters at the front of each line. One is led thus to consider whether it is just as bad verse to fail to arouse a rhythmical expectation, or to fail to satisfy an aroused expectation, as it is bad prose either to arouse the expectation or to satisfy it.

Now, in the first place, it is obvious that a too complete satisfaction of expectation is not desirable, even in verse. Variety is the spice of poetry as well as of prose. The real question is therefore not whether the rhythms of verse may vary from the regular, but whether they may vary so far that they do not differ in the degree of their variation from those of prose. Much of the free verse of recent years, but also the Pindaric odes and rhapsodies of earlier times, is of this extremely irregular type of verse. So far as its rhythm is concerned, it does not differ from the rhythm of impassioned prose, and if it were printed as prose, it would often be taken with less question as prose than it can be taken as verse when it is printed in broken lines. Other features of style may aid in establishing it as poetry, the diction of it, the figures of speech employed, the character of the ideas it expresses, and these indeed may lead to a special kind of reading, a recitative with

pauses so managed as to produce in some degree a distinction from the rhythms of prose. But, as Professor Patterson has shown,[1] there is no *tertium quid* between the rhythm of prose and the rhythm of verse. Mixtures of the two may occur, but the mixture does not result in a new compound, in a fusion which makes a new creation. The result is rather a mosaic, which may readily be separated into its verse and prose fragments. Rhythmical poetry of this free kind is likely to be extremely restless, to keep the reader on the alert so that he may be ready at a moment's notice to respond to the changing rhythmical demands which the poet makes upon him. Whether the experience is agreeable or disagreeable depends very much upon the readers of the poetry, some of whom like it, while others do not. Those who do not like it are not necessarily feebly rhythmical, and in fact their dislike may be due to their being so aggressively rhythmical that they resent keenly the poet's failure to satisfy a standard of rhythm which they would have him employ. The verse effect of free verse may of course depend upon the larger groupings and sequences of sentences, corresponding to the stanzas of regular verse, or to the grouping of rimed lines together, or to the paragraph sequences of prose.

If prose is rhythmical language which produces the impression of being primarily unregulated and unconstrained, and verse is language which on the other hand is primarily manipulated and regular, free verse may be characterized as neither consistently the one nor the other, but now one and now the other. For or against such mixed practices in rhythm can be cited only the judgment

[1] *The Rhythm of Prose*, p. 77.

of taste. When it is crudely done, the writing of free verse becomes a manifest absurdity. When it is skillfully done, the result is usually not prose at all, but verse with approximately regular but concealed rhythms. For this style of verse there is probably a legitimate demand in human nature. The kind of writing in which free verse seems most appropriate, the kind in which it has been most frequently and effectively employed, is a somewhat ejaculatory, oratorically lyrical kind. A plain, orderly narrative in free verse would soon become plain orderly prose. But for a kaleidoscopic view of striking emotions or pictures in rapid succession, free verse offers an admirable form. In this form one may enjoy the peculiar emotion and glow of poetry, its temperamental elevation and freedom, without translating the experience into an altogether different and artful world from that of daily life. One may desire to forget neither the existence of prose nor the existence of poetry, but to remember them both at the same time. For this mood no better expression can be found than that in which the poet abandons himself completely neither to one tendency nor to the other. If the result rhythmically is a style of expression which satisfies a sense of appropriateness, in so far the style has the only kind of justification any style can have. It is futile to talk of mixed arts as decadent, to insist that prose must be prose and verse must be verse, both so plainly that they need no guide post to save some possibly erring readers. The end of style is not to save all readers from error. Sometimes a writer must choose his audience, and selection means also rejection. But in the enthusiasm of recent discovery, some lovers of free verse go entirely too far in the claims they

make for it. There seems to be no good reason for believing that free verse will provide the exclusive models for the poetical rhythms of the future. The fever of revolt against the restrictions of meter of the traditional types will no doubt burn down, as similar fevers have done before. For poets generally have not regarded meter as a cramping limitation. On the contrary, they have delighted to work within the confines of a technical requirement which gives to their art one of its most distinguishing qualities.

In the treatment of the stanza in verse, one finds the same diversity as in the treatment of the line. In the regular kind of poetry, which one perhaps may call the good old-fashioned kind, stanzaic structure once established for a poem is repeated without alteration throughout its whole length. If the stanza structure changes, this is usually meant as an indication that the poem contains a poem within the poem, like the lyrics Byron introduced into *Childe Harold.* The writing of stanzaic verse, in which rime usually plays an important part, is a kind of game of skill, a juggler's trick in which three balls, the line, the rime, and the stanza, are all kept moving at the same time. To fail in one respect is an evidence of awkwardness, a failure to live up to the rules of the game. Now in a game of precision, anything short of precision must be regarded as inept or slovenly. Experience may enable one to play the game easily, but experience does not absolve one from playing it with exactness. The writer of free verse does not attempt, however, to write a regular stanza form at all, and thereby protects himself against the exactions which a strictly regular scheme of verse imposes. He varies the length of his lines to suit

the thought of the moment, and his larger rhythmical groups are determined in the same way, by the natural rise and fall of his thought. Such stanzas correspond to the paragraph divisions of prose, that is, are not stanzas at all, unless they are repeated with such regularity that the reader can forecast the character of the paragraphs before he has come to them.

The student who undertakes to discipline himself in the rhythms of speech, especially the free rhythms of prose, can best begin by devoting his attention to the beginnings and the endings of his phrases, clauses, and sentences. When the beginning and the end of a rhythmical group are established, little uncertainty can be felt in the ordering of the rest of it. The two most obvious rhythmical beginnings for sentences are the slow and the abrupt. A slow beginning is made when the sentence opens with unemphatic and unstressed words, like *It is*, or *There are*, or a mere connecting form word, like *though*, *so*, *however*, *therefore*. Slow beginnings often produce an effect of feebleness, and when they do so inappropriately, the sentence, or clause, will of course be recast into more vigorous rhythms. They have their proper uses, however, these light beginnings, and an absolute rule that every sentence must begin with an abrupt explosion would reject what may be a valuable variation.

The ends of phrases and clauses may be lyrical, when the phrase or clause ends in one or sometimes two unstressed syllables, or strong when the phrase or clause ends in an accented syllable. A predominance of lyrical endings produces a light rhythmical effect, and a predominance of strong endings appears in the serious steady style of argumentative or descriptive or expository prose.

Compare, for example, the differing effects of the phrase endings in the following two sentences from the conclusion of Pater's essay on Lamb:

"Here, the surface of things is certainly humdrum, / the streets dingy, / the green places, / where the child goes a-maying, / tame enough./ But nowhere are things more apt to respond to the brighter weather, / nowhere is there so much difference between rain and sunshine, / nowhere do the clouds roll together more grandly, / those quaint suburban pastorals gathering a certain quality of grandeur / from the background of the great city / with its weighty atmosphere / and portent of storm / in the rapid light on dome and bleached stone steeples."

Though the beginnings and endings of phrases and clauses are important points at which the general character of rhythm is established, they by no means provide the clues for the determination of all rhythmical effects. Equally important are the larger rhythmical movements which depend upon the sequence of phrases, clauses, and sentences. These larger movements are of two general types which may be called the impeded and the rapid. An impeded rhythmical effect results when the general movement in a sentence is interrupted by parenthetic clauses, not merely by those which may be separated from the body of the sentence by dashes or other punctuation, but also by relative clauses inserted as qualifications of the main thought, or by antitheses, parallels, or other rhetorical elaborations. The sentence just written may be taken as an illustrative example of an impeded rhythmical style. Periodic sentences, and in general all sentences of a complicated syntactical structure, necessarily move more slowly than simple direct

sentences. They have more dignity, more volume of rhythmical effect than the rapid style, virtues which may readily pass over into the vices of excessive involution, heaviness, and artificiality. The prevailing taste in modern style certainly does not tend in the direction of impeded rhythms. These are more in the manner of the old school of writing, of the Miltonic and Johnsonian period, which flourished when formal elaboration was less impatiently regarded than it is today.

The rapid rhythmical style implies on the whole a simple syntactical structure. A sequence of short simple sentences, so far at least as rhythmical effect is concerned, moves more rapidly than a sequence of involved sentences. It does not follow that the short sentences carry the thought along more rapidly, but merely that they carry it in a different way. If a sentence containing a relative clause is made into two sentences, the thought may remain the same, but each of the two sentences moves forward without interruption and the general rhythmical effect is simpler and swifter. The extreme of the rapid style would be found in writing composed entirely of a succession of short simple sentences. Here again, however, it is obvious that the virtues of the rapid style may be carried to excess. Too great simplification produces a staccato, jerky style that easily becomes monotonous. The middle ground between formal pomposity and bare simplicity is one on which the good qualities of both styles meet in a style varied and modulated to suit the changing character of the thought.

Melody in speech is always present, except in those rare moments when one speaks in a monotone. These are so rare and exceptional, however, as not to invalidate

the statement that all normal speech is melodious, whether it is heard directly by the ear or translated into hearing through the eye in reading. The melody of one language is not the same as that of another, as is evident when one compares French with English, or Swedish with German, and even in the same language, the observer often notes striking differences in the dialects of separate regions. The source of all melodic variation in speech, as in other kinds of sound, is the change in pitch of the sounds that issue from the sound-producing organism. This fact may be simply illustrated for the voice by repeating the same vowel, at exactly equal intervals of time and with exactly the same emphasis, but at different elevations of pitch. The result will be a melodic tune the quality of which as a tune will be determined entirely by the rising and falling of the voice. Some of the simpler melodic variations in speech are apparent to the most careless observer, as, for example, the rising of the voice in a question, or the falling of it at the end of a statement of fact. But these distinctions scarcely make a beginning of the almost infinite inflections of the speaking voice. So numerous and varied are they that they defy analysis. They must be heard and cannot be described, for they are such a subtle manifestation of the life of language that seldom are they acquired by the taking of thought, seldom is anyone in speaking consciously aware of their existence. And yet individuals differ markedly in the melodies of their speech. In general it may be said that an intense and highly nervous speech is likely to be less melodious than more relaxed and gentler speech. The reason for this is apparent. Starting on a high-strung level and remaining in a high-strung mood, the nervous speaker tends to employ only his

limited range of higher notes, terminating in the squeak or shriek. If he starts, however, on a medium level, he readily varies his range above and below this level. Choice of melody in speech, so far as it is a matter of practical choice at all, means consequently a choice of the mood which underlies expression. The preaching, scolding mood of Carlyle carries with it a different set of speech melodies from those of the gentle Hawthorne. Every writer has his appropriate melodies and tunes, which are all the more revealing because they are for the most part unconscious.

If it is impracticable to organize systematically the melodies of speech from the point of view of style, still less is it practicable to treat of the tones or qualities of sound in speech. It would be easier if one were sure that there existed an inner appropriateness between sounds and the objects they designate. In the case of a comparatively few onomatopoetic words, like *whir*, *dazzle*, and others, this inner appropriateness is fairly evident. But such words are not numerous and name only ideas of very immediate appeal to the senses. Plato maintained that the sounds of the initial consonants in the Greek equivalents of words like *glue*, *clammy* had for their inner and necessary meaning the idea of the sticky, the gelatinous, but one becomes dubious when one puts beside these words others like *glad*, *gleam*, *clear*, *clean*. Certain medieval theorists maintained that the masculine principle is expressed in the full vowels of the name of Adam, and the feminine in the narrower vowels of the name of Eve. But if so, then "madam" must be a strangely infelicitous word regarded as a harmony of sound and meaning. If *gold*, *tin*, *lead*, *silver*, *stone*, *wood*, seem to be peculiarly ap-

propriate names for the materials thus designated, most of this appropriateness must be laid to the account of habit and familiarity, not to inner necessity. Would not *stone* do as well for the name of wood, or *gold* as well for stone? Habit breeds a sense of necessity in the harmony between words and objects which is more imaginary than real. It may not be true that a rose by any other name would sound as well, but it must be a very absurd name that the beauty of the rose cannot dignify. And if there is inner appropriateness in the name *wood* for that material, is French *bois* or German *Holz* equally appropriate? or if *lead* is just the right name for lead, what shall one say of German *Blei?*

The truth is indeed that sounds in themselves are purely sensuous experiences and can have intellectual meaning attached to them only by convention. Their direct appeal to the hearer is emotional and not intellectual. As a stimulus to feeling, however, sounds may produce clearly marked effects, and these effects may be very much the same in one person as in another. A sense of amplitude, of extension, for example, may be produced by a succession of words with long vowels, especially long open vowels, and a sense of fineness, thinness, of elevation, by long, tense, narrow vowels. The consonants also have their associations, helping to produce the effects of a rugged or a liquid style, a rapid or an impeded style. This musical quality of the sounds of language is specially marked in poetic style, as in Shakspere's "the multitudinous seas incarnadine," in Tennyson's "the moan of doves in immemorial elms," Matthew Arnold's "Over the lit sea's unquiet way," Keats's "Silent, upon a peak in Darien." The effects are sometimes merely realistically

descriptive rather than poetical, as in the line from Browning,

> Quick and sharp rang the rings down the net poles.

This line of Browning's suggests that there is danger in the too facile use of the musical suggestibility of language. A strikingly insistent musical word or phrase becomes very tyrannical. It rings in the ears long after one would gladly forget it. Such a phrase is Lowell's "exhaustless grace of Niagara's emerald curve," a clever line that might be forgiven in verse but which cheapens the style of the prose passage in which it occurs. Ingenuity can do a great deal with the tones of speech in the way of musical description, but such devices, when they become too pat and apparent, seem like trifling with the serious purposes of language. Heard melodies in speech are sweet, but not when they are too insistently heard.

XXVIII

THE PLEA OF POETIC LICENSE

"This poeticall licence," says the Elizabethan Gascoigne, in his *Certayne notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English*, "is a shrewd fellow, and covereth many faults in a verse. It maketh wordes longer, shorter, of mo sillables, of fewer, newer, older, truer, falser, and to conclude, it turkeneth all things at pleasure." The author of what may fairly be called the first modern English grammar, Bishop Lowth, who published his *Short Introduction* in 1767, is similarly impressed with the evil practices of the poets. They are, he says, "commonly the worst grammarians of the world." And in support of this sweeping charge, he brings forward many instances by way of proof, sparing none of the great names of his time.

No extended demonstration is needed to show that the language of poetry follows a different set of habits from that of prose. More or less consciously the poet places himself upon a different plane from the writer of prose, not only in the character of his thought, but also in the forms of its outer expression. Meter is one of the most obvious and most constant of the characteristics of poetical expression, but it is only one of many devices for giving verse its proper note of distinction. Archaic and newly coined words, new and strange compounds, departures from normal word-order and syntax, unusual stress, the shortening

or prolongation of syllables, all these licenses are used with varying degrees of freedom by different poets, but to some extent even by the most naturalistic of them. The native language of English poetry has, indeed, come to be one which, from the point of view of prose, is altogether unnatural and artificial.

In most instances this natural-artificial language of poetry does not raise the question of its relation to the language of prose. If we read poetry at all, we know what to expect, and consequently make allowances for the conventions of poetry as we do for the conventions of the stage when we go to the theater. We understand that the poet is writing that peculiar sort of English which the poets affect, and though we have no tendency to imitate him in our own daily use, we nevertheless permit him to play his game according to the rules which he has established for it. At least we usually permit him to do so. Sometimes, however, the discrepancy between natural prose use and poetical use is so striking as to thrust itself upon the reader's attention. The language of poetry often takes the language of prose and forcibly adapts it to its own purposes. Then there arises a conflict between the grammar of prose and the grammar of poetry, the chances of the victory of the latter being in direct proportion to the power of the poetic spell which it exerts over the reader. The inexperienced and the careless rimester are especially liable to fall into the error of satisfying conditions of meter by some outrageous sacrifice of the conventional rules of grammatical propriety. From the inexpert rimester the comic poet has learned to heighten the comic effect of his situation by the burlesque of grammar, as in "John Gilpin's Ride":

My sister and my sister's child,
  Myself and children three,
Will fill the chaise; so you must ride
  On horseback after we.

Thackeray's "Little Billee" gets a rime and a comic effect in the same way:

Says gorging Jack to guzzling Jimmy,
  "I am extremely hungaree."
To gorging Jack says guzzling Jimmy,
  "We've nothing left, us must eat we."

These grammatical compromises for the sake of rime stand out in their full absurdity because the reader feels himself still in the regions of prose. His eyes are not blinded by any poetical glamor which might lead him to forgive violations of prose use for the sake of metrical regularity.

The blunders of the simple and the comic rimester, however, differ only in degree, not in kind, from those of the serious versifiers. Poets whose prose use is perfectly normal and regular are liable in verse to all sorts of grammatical improprieties and awkwardnesses, and this not because they think the license of verse gives them a dispensation from the rules of grammar, but because for the time being they forget their rules of grammar. They have their eyes fixed on the "higher law" of poetry, and lowly prose must correspondingly suffer. It was this weakness of the poets that provided Bishop Lowth with the main incentive to the composition of his pioneer treatise on grammar. He points out, for example, that the exigency of meter "hath led Mr. Pope into a great impropriety in the beginning of his 'Messiah':

"O Thou my voice inspire
Who touch'd Isaiah's hallow'd lips with fire!

The solemnity of the style would not admit of *You* for *Thou* in the pronoun; nor the measure of the verse *touched'st* or *did'st touch*, in the verb, as it indispensably ought to be in the one or the other of these two forms: *You*, who *touched*, or Thou, who *touched'st* or *did'st touch*." The bishop has certainly found a crevice in the poet's armor. For Pope could not, and would not, have defended his grammar except on the ground of poet's privilege — an argument of last resort. Other examples cited in the *Short Introduction* show a cheerful disregard of the tense forms of the verb, as in Gay's lines:

Sure some disaster has *befell:*
Speak, Nurse, I hope the boy is well.

Or, as in this, from Roscommon's "Essay":

For rhyme in Greece and Rome was never known
Till by barbarian deluges *o'erflown.*

In one of Robert Greene's sonnets occurs a rime which not even the most reckless versifier today would risk:

In Cypress sat fair Venus by a fount,
Wanton Adonis toying on her knee:
She kissed the wag, her darling of account;
The boy 'gan blush, which when his lover *see,*
She smiled, and told him love might challenge debt,
And he was young and might be wanton yet.

The cases of pronouns are also treated in a high-handed way, as in these lines from Prior:

Forever in this humble cell
Let *Thee* and *I*, my fair one, dwell;

or the same author's

> The sun upon the calmest sea
> Appears not half as bright as *Thee.*

The last stanza of the sprightly "Better Answer" of the same poet is colloquial style, but a colloquialism such as must have shocked the sense of propriety not only of such purists as the reverend grammarian from whom we quote, but that of any careful speaker or writer of the time:

> Then finish, dear Chloe, this Pastoral war,
> And let us like Horace and Lydia agree;
> For thou art a Girl as much brighter than *her*
> As he was a Poet sublimer than *me.*

This loose treatment of the cases of pronouns in comparison has led Swift into an unintentional bit of humor in his lines to Stella:

> And tho' by heaven's severe decree
> She suffers hourly more than me.

Swift does not mean that he is only one of the many sorrows that the subject of the poem must endure. No serious reader, to be sure, really questions his actual meaning, but such grammar as this of Swift and Prior and Pope convinces us that the hour was ripe for the coming of Dr. Johnson and his crew.

The poets of the eighteenth century are not alone, however, in their liberal attitude toward grammatical regulations. In all periods and in all kinds of verse the poetic fervor of composition has raised the poet above the restrictions of the rule-book. Chaucer, for example, who wrote in the Midland dialect of London, in which the regular ending of the third present singular of the verb is *-eth,*

as in the modern ceremonious *singeth*, occasionally writes third singulars in *-s*, after the fashion of the Northern dialect. Thus nothing short of the rime could have induced him to use the form *telles* in the lines:

> For she desired nothing elles
> In certeyn, as the book us telles.
> — *House of Fame*, II, 425, 426

Chaucer, however, was decidedly more conscientious than many of his contemporaries in this respect. The unknown author of the charming romance of "Floris and Blanchefleur," for example, seems to have been of the conviction that all that any one could fairly ask of him was that his verse should rime, cost what it might. And so he frequently employs rimes at the expense of inflectional syllables, or even invents new grammatical forms to satisfy his ear. This is, of course, the method of the unskilled rimester always. He does not realize that to play the game of tagging verses he must keep two balls in the air at the same time — he must get his rimes and he must keep his reader from suspecting that any of his means of getting them are illegitimate.

The modern, as well as the older, poets have not always been able to play their game with perfect precision. Byron, for example, seems to have had an unusually weak sense of the authority of grammar as compared with the authority of sound. Thus the rule of tense-formation goes by the board in *Childe Harold*, Canto IV, St. CLXXX:

> And send'st him shivering in the playful spray
> And howling, to his Gods, where haply lies
> His petty hope in some near port or bay,
> And dashest him again to earth: — there let him *lay*.

Rime again is the cause of the illogical coördination of the singular *hath wrapt* and the plural *wrap* in *Childe Harold*, Canto IV, St. LXXXI:

> The double night of ages, and of her,
> Night's daughter, hath wrapt and wrap
> All round us: we but feel our way to err.
> The ocean has its chart, the stars their map,
> And Knowledge spreads them on her ample lap.

After such words as *but*, *save*, *except*, and so forth, the poets are inclined to use nominative or objective forms of the pronoun according to convenience. This is a freedom that goes back as far as Chaucer, and it is exemplified also to a certain extent in modern colloquial speech. *Between you and I*, for example, may not be good grammar, but it is certainly current English. The concluding stanza of the "Isles of Greece" in *Don Juan* furnishes a poetical instance:

> Place me on Sunium's marble steep
> Where nothing save the waves and I
> May hear our mutual murmurs sweep;
> There, swan-like, let me sing and die.

A kind of defense may be made for Byron's use on this ground that the pronoun *I* is so far separated from its preposition *save* that the feeling for case-government is lost, and the pronoun thus takes the nominative as the typical form. As much cannot be said, however, for Mrs. Browning, in her "Deserted Garden":

> I called this place my wilderness,
> For no one entered there but I.
> The sheep look'd in, the grass to espy,
> And pass'd it ne'ertheless.

Altogether shocking to the normal grammatical sense is Alfred Austin's *save we*, in "Moving Onward":

All things always the same, unchanged, unchangeable, all save we,
Who come like clouds, like clouds disappear, form and fall like waves of the sea.

Indeed, the feeling for case in the pronoun seems to be one of the weakest points in the normal grammatical system, since it continually gives way, even under comparatively light pressure. This is quite in harmony with the general feeling in the English language, which regards case as less a matter of form than of position in order of words. If the noun does not distinguish the form of its nominative from the form of its accusative, why should the pronoun? Why are not *him* and *me* just as good nominatives as accusatives, and *vice versa*, *he* and *I* as good accusatives as nominatives? Some such sub-conscious feeling must have led the poets astray in those frequent instances in which they depart from the honored traditions of the regimen of cases. Lowell, in the "Commemoration Ode," uses a nominative for an accusative, betrayed here by the rime:

Let beacon-fire to answering beacon speak,
Katahdin tell Monadnock, Whiteface *he*,
And so leap on in light from sea to sea.

Professor Postgate, in his interesting introductory essay to the English translation of M. Bréal's *Essai de Sémantique*, quotes the following instance of poetical grammar from Harriet E. H. King's "Haunted Czar":

Did not God make us, I and thou?
Have pity even for his sake.
My hair is blanched upon my brow,
At every rose's fall I shake.

And he then adds: "What is the unfortunate writer to do? *I and thou* is 'ungrammatical,' and *me and thee* would be ridiculous." In answer, one with a strong grammatical sense of the prose kind might say that *I and thou* as apposition to *us* is ridiculous too. The only thing which makes one accept *thou* is the compensating advantage of a rime with *brow*. And Professor Postgate's objection that *me and thee* is ridiculous surely goes a bit beyond the mark. The collocation may be less euphonious than *I and thou*, but it is too obviously necessary to the sentimental poet to be ridiculous. How often have not the poets been compelled to link *thee* and *me*, as Byron does in the lines:

Let Folly smile, to view the names
Of thee and me in friendship twined.

The fact is that the author of the "Haunted Czar" has had her choice and made it. She had the privilege of writing *me and thee*, thus satisfying grammatical propriety; or of writing *I and thou*, gaining thus euphony and a rime word at the expense of the grammatical convention. Whether or not she has paid too dearly for her rime, each must judge for himself. It may be observed, however, that she has offended against the rules of polite grammar also in placing her pronoun of the first person before the pronoun of the second. But having secured her rime *thou* and *brow*, she rests satisfied, and doubtless most of her readers do the same.

The opening line of Browning's "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" contains a similar instance of liberal syntax:

> She, men would have to be your mother once,
> Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was.

Logically and grammatically the pronoun *she* should read *her* — Old Gandolf envied me her whom men would have to be your mother. But the bishop is perhaps speaking with something of the incoherence and looseness of grasp of a mind nearing dissolution. The thought of the love of his youth first calls up in his mind the image of her vividly, and this gets recognition simply as a type idea, She — the inexpressible She. It is the anticipatory mood of the sentence, and what follows has to adapt itself grammatically to that word as best it can. At any rate, the grammatical *her* would have a decidedly weaker effect in the line. What we have is bad grammar but good poetry. As a contrasting illustration of good grammar but bad poetry, the first of the following two lines of a poem which Miss Sinclair inserts in the *Divine Fire* may be noted:

> For he I serve hath paced Heaven's golden floor,
> And chanted with the Seraphim's glad choir.

An instinctive feeling against the collocation of the two nominatives *he* and *I* would change *he* to *him*, although as the subject of *hath*, the form *he* is grammatically proper.

The rules of concord are another of the weak spots in the English grammatical system, and the poets have found this out. Grant-Duff, in the second volume of his *Diary*, tells us that a manuscript of Gray's "Elegy," "written most carefully by the poet's own hand," leaves

no doubt that when Gray wrote his poem, he meant the disputed line which precedes

> The paths of glory lead but to the grave,

to read not *await*, but

> Awaits alike the inevitable hour.

The whole stanza would therefore read:

> The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
> And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
> Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:
> The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

It is easy to see how Gray might be led into this "mistake." When he came to his third line, under the slight distraction of metrical composition, he apparently thought of it as though it was *Each awaits alike*, whereas the natural sequence after the first two lines would be *All alike await*. Again, propinquity to the word *ages* has apparently caused the plural form *glide* (usually corrected to *glides* in the editions) in Bryant's line in "Thanatopsis":

> The long train of ages glide away.

A cruder instance of the same thing, assisted here by the quest for a rime, is exemplified in the following stanza of a recent magazine poem:

> O Lady Moon! O Lady Moon!
> Where is it that you hide all day?
> What cave frequent in high mid-noon,
> When most the sun his beams *display?*

Deviation from the strict law of concord is often convenient without being altogether ungrammatical. Thus in the line of Kipling's "Recessional,"

The shouting and the tumult dies,

the last word riming on *sacrifice*, the two subjects may be thought of disjunctively, or they may be thought of as so nearly related in meaning that they constitute a single idea. A singular verb would be appropriate in either case. But neither explanation is satisfactory. The passage is not quite parallel to that other passage from "The Rowers":

They had no heart for the rally and roar
That makes the whale-bath smoke,

where "rally and roar" does well enough as a singular subject. The shouting and the tumult, however, are more effective when thought of as two different things, coördinated, and the usual rule demands a plural verb after them. The singular is not usual prose syntax, although the grammatical freedom is here concealed and perhaps justified by a good rime.

Another instance in which the necessity of finding an unusual rime has affected the rules of concord and at the same time the thought of the poem, is to be found in Tennyson's "Flower in the Crannied Wall":

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower — but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

The singular *is* at the end of the poem may be justified in the same way as the singular *dies* in Kipling — that is, the subjects *God and man* may be thought of disjunctively, or, as Tennyson evidently intended, they may be thought

of as being so nearly related as to constitute but a single idea. That this pantheistic conception of the oneness of God and man, and, by implication, of the flower and all nature beside, is inherent in the original lyric impulse of the poem may be doubted. It seems rather an accidental addition. The lyric suggestion of the poem starts from the little flower, its seeming insignificance, but its real importance regarded as one of the mysteries of life. If I could explain this flower, says the poet, I could explain the whole mystery of human nature and divine nature. But the theme of the mystery of life does not carry with it as corollary the idea of the unity of all life. The original lyric mood is overlaid with the philosophical conception suggested by the necessity of finding a rime for *crannies*, and the grammatical singular of the last line really adds a new and extraneous idea to the poem.

Doubtless the poets from whom we have quoted would be little troubled if they could see the string of examples here held up to public gaze. There is not, indeed, much in these examples to be disturbed over. To write metrically and to write grammatically at the same time is not an art rarely exemplified in English poetry. At the same time, the poets' violations of the rules of grammar, so far as they go, fairly raise the question of their justification. Shall they be allowed to find shelter beneath the broad mantle of poetic license, and nothing said? Is the spirit of the English language so lawless, that if one wishes to write poetry, it is petty and impertinent to talk about or to think about the rules of grammar? The obvious answer to these questions is that the pôet's grammar is justified when it justifies itself. There is no esoteric standard of manner or of value to which it must conform,

but it is its own measure. In this the poet's use of language is like all other use of language. The justification of any form of language lies in its perfect adaptation to the end which it is to attain. So far as it fails to attain its purpose, by adding ever so little or subtracting ever so little, in so far it fails to justify itself. And so the poet's bad grammar, his poetic license in general, will justify itself whenever it succeeds. If he gets a rime by doing violence to the case-forms of pronouns, and if I am one who has such a strong feeling for rime that it never occurs to me to think about such trifles as grammar and case, then the poet is justified. He is satisfied, and I am satisfied, and as the purpose of language is to secure a satisfactory transmission from one person to another, all the conditions for the adequate use of language are satisfied.

But suppose I am one who has a strong prose sense, so that the illusions of poetry readily give way, or suppose some trouble-hunting critic has called attention to the grammatical irregularity which has escaped me, then the poet's language ceases to be satisfactory. It calls up extraneous and inappropriate ideas. Will the reader who has once observed it ever be able to pass the lines quoted from the "Commemoration Ode" without thinking of the grammatical slip contained therein? He may determine not to think of it, but the very determination itself is a proof that the expression of the thought at that point is not completely satisfying and perfect. The poet's language is subject, therefore, to the same control as everybody else's language. When it is successful it is justified, since the success is its justification. With the poet we are inclined to put ourselves in the suffering and receptive

attitude of mind more readily than with others. His poetic license means that we are willing to accept what he does — until he does something which we do not like, when immediately we revoke his special license. Then it matters little how fine a rime he gets or how neat a turn of thought; if he allows the feeling for the normal in language to rise up in complaint against any of his abnormal uses, then he has failed. And although this poetical license is indeed a shrewd fellow and covereth many faults in a verse, this is a fault that he cannot cover.

XXIX

WRITING AS A FINE ART

In precept and in practice Pater is commonly taken as illustrating the theory of writing as a fine art. All disinterested lovers of books, Pater says at one place, will always look to literature, as to all other fine art, "for a refuge, a sort of cloistral refuge, from a certain vulgarity in the actual world." Fine art, he continues, has for such disinterested lovers "something of the uses of a religious 'retreat,'" and it is for a "select few," for "those men of a finer thread who have formed and maintained the literary ideal," that literature at its best exists.

A disinterested lover of literature, however, is hard to conceive. If anyone, the lover is bound to be partisan. Only he can be disinterested who looks upon literature with the scientist's spirit, as something to be examined and analyzed, or as the objectifying formalist does, as an activity which has life and being independent of the persons through whom its activity is manifested, and which thus may have value independently of its effect upon its human recipients. Is it not mere pride of intellect, one is led to ask, which would make a fine art in writing into a religious retreat for the select world-wearied few, a pride arising from the artist's satisfaction and exultation in what he conceives to be peculiar to himself and consequently higher and better than that which can be shared with others?

As to the "certain vulgarity in the actual world," of which Pater speaks, this is a difficult matter. We have not here to do with judgments of reason, of common sense, but with impressions of feeling, of temperament. In the eyes of one of Pater's way of thinking, the mere denial of the vulgarity of the actual world carries no weight. The denial invalidates itself. In common charity, however, the vulgarian must be allowed to express his belief. That a tree or a flower, growing and blowing in its natural setting, or a man or a woman with all the thousand and one accompaniments of life that an artist can never hope to represent, should be less admirable than the picture of a tree or flower or of a man or a woman, seems hard to understand. Remoter from the actual world the picture may be, but is there any essential reason why remoteness from actuality should result in a quality of refinement which the actual itself lacks? We may grant that the appeal of the picture is different from the appeal of the living fact, we may assume that its interest is less intimate and less profound, and less generally moving of the whole complex of the human soul; but that it is for these reasons higher, or better, or more comforting to the spirit, does not follow. Is it not again a weakness to flee from the actualities of the real world and to seek a "cloistral refuge" in our poor limited sentimental transcriptions of the actual world? Marvelous the works of the painter's brush and of the writer's pen are when they are viewed from the side of human inadequacy and ineffectiveness, but they sink into almost contemptible insignificance when we measure them against the exhaustless and effortless richness of life itself.

A sequence, almost a necessary sequence, of this exalted view of the value of art, and the corresponding deprecia-

tion of the value of the actual world, is the belief in a kind of mystical unity between the thought and its expression. This is often merely the old belief in an absolute standard of excellence beyond that of human experience, and Pater has included this doctrine likewise in his literary creed. The well-known chapter on Euphuism in *Marius the Epicurean* expresses this ideal. Pater here uses the term "Euphuism" in its strictly etymological sense, not in the commonly accepted historical sense, according to which it designates certain extravagant characteristics of Elizabethan style, centering about Lyly and his contemporaries. These extravagances Pater regards merely as the accidents, so to speak, of Euphuism, the "fopperies and mannerisms" on the surface "symptomatic of that deeper yearning of human nature toward ideal perfection, which is a continuous force in it." And this is the essence of Euphuism, a deep regard for expression, apart from thought, a quest for an ideal perfection of form, absolutely and inalterably right in the nature of things. At another place Pater quotes sympathetically, from a commentator on Flaubert, the belief of Flaubert "in some mysterious harmony of expression," the conviction that "there exists but one way of expressing one thing, one word to call it by, one adjective to qualify, one verb to animate it." And Pater adds that the whole problem of style lies there, in the finding of "the unique word, phrase, sentence, paragraph, essay or story."

As a practical preventive of loose and careless writing this doctrine is undoubtedly of great service, especially to beginners, but as a defensible philosophical statement, it has little foundation to rest upon. The belief in a unique word for each and every human thought, implies

an objective counterpart to human thought in language. But how has the language come into existence? It is merely the accumulated total of the voluntary linguistic acts of all the past generations which have used the language. Now the race has lived so long, has passed through the experiences common to humanity so frequently, that it has in most instances fashioned, even consecrated, we might almost say, certain words for their appropriate uses. To detach violently these words from their uses is of course a crime against all the sacred customs of the speech. But we cannot for a moment suppose that past experience has exhausted all the possibilities of human experience, and if a new experience arise, how can there be already existent in language the unique word or phrase which is to give it expression? Flaubert's theory, in short, does not take account of the fact that language is a human invention, is indeed a piece of practical, human machinery, and that like all human inventions, it has its imperfections and inadequacies. Logicians are fond of discussing how far language conditions thought. That it does so to some extent cannot be questioned, and the literary artist in seeking his final and unique word is often compelled, unconsciously perhaps to himself, to adapt his thought to the exigencies of the language. When he has brought his thought to its full expression, he may persuade himself that it could not have been expressed otherwise by a syllable or a comma, but this is a flattering conviction, an emotional, subjective synthesis of his thought and his expression, which may not appeal to others. Even the crudest literary artist, as observation proves, may be persuaded of the ultimate perfection of his art. If he has no other standard of propriety in

expression than his subjective certainty, if his only test is that he "feels" his expression to have hit the unique word or phrase, the likelihood that his expression will impress others as it does himself is dependent entirely upon the extent of the past experience of the race and the language which he has assimilated and made his own.

At the other extreme from the exaggerated idealism of form and art in writing, lies the question whether modern English style is at its best when it moves toward a spare and efficient utilitarianism. In the broadly conceived sense of that term, perhaps style can never become too utilitarian. If we understand the purpose of language to be the expression of the whole of human life, then the justification of language can only be its use in the realization of this purpose. Aside from this use it has no significance and no value. But the whole of human life is an ample field for the activities of language, and such a generous utilitarian conception of style or language needs no defense. Exemplifications are not lacking, however, of a tendency toward a much narrower interpretation of the purpose and meaning of literary expression. This is called a practical age, and the description — or charge — is in many ways justified. That which is not immediately and obviously efficient, is put on the defensive. We are inclined to measure everything by an economic standard, not necessarily a money standard, but by some avowed and explicit measure of immediate efficiency. The instinctive test of likes and dislikes, the cultivation of the pleasant merely because it pleases, of the beautiful because it is beautiful, are held to be unsafe rules of conduct, and unworthy an age which knows its own mind and what is best for it.

Literature takes on, nowadays, the reportorial tone to an extent never before equaled in its history. The newspapers themselves, one of the most important literary phenomena of our age, are of course the greatest purveyors of fact and commentators on fact. In the gradual extension of the liberal spirit in letters, they have become the mouthpiece of the great popular party whose interests as yet rarely extend beyond the concrete facts of their immediate experience. But other and professedly higher forms of literature as well, the drama, the novel, the essay, concern themselves mainly with newspaper matters, with problems and policies which differ from those discussed in the daily press only in that the treatment of them is a little more analytic and remote, and that dates, places and real names are not supplied. The few weak efforts made to escape from the tyranny of the newspaper report, as for example in the artificial romance or tale of adventure, or in the melodramatic play, only emphasize the bondage under which we labor. The appealing subjects today are men and women in the immediate relations and complications of daily life.

In all this there is nothing that in itself need be seriously deplored. Literature should serve as a medium of record and of comment on life, and we may rejoice to see the contact between the experiences of life and their expression as general and as intimate as it is. At the same time, the practical interest of the content of literature today tends to react upon literary expression in a way not altogether to be commended. Important as the qualities of efficient, businesslike directness are, they should not be allowed to dominate the whole of English expression. There are moods in which sincerity to the mood lies not in

a spare efficiency, but in a more diffused, less obvious, and less direct method of attack. Our reportorial English, having overcome the crude vices of bombast and turgidity, tends to become meager in outline, to acquire the nervous thinness of the highly trained athlete or race-horse. But style need not always be as one stripped for the race, and in writing, as elsewhere, the quickest way is often the longest way round.

A typical defense of the neat athletic style as contrasted with what may be called the style of art is that made by Herbert Spencer in his essay *The Philosophy of Style*. The governing idea of Spencer's philosophy is economy. In the broad significance of that term, as of utilitarianism, economy is a sufficient principle to cover the whole ground. The best expression is undoubtedly that which attains the end of the expression most certainly, most swiftly, and with the least necessary effort. Anything which diverts attention from the result to be attained is bad because it necessarily subtracts by so much from the amount of energy bestowed upon the real point at issue. But having established this principle of economy, Spencer makes the mistake of supposing that it will be more forcible if he limits its significance. The best English style, he declares, is that which is simple, straightforward, direct. The best vocabulary is the Saxon vocabulary, because its words are short, therefore produce their effect immediately, and are familiar through long use, and therefore are appreciated without effort. Concrete terms are better than abstract because the mental accompaniment of concrete expression is likely to be more definite and solid than of abstract expression. Consequently, says Spencer, do not write in general and abstract terms, but in concrete and

specific terms. In other words, according to Spencer, writing is at its best when it is an efficient machine, not when it is a fine art.

The obvious objection to be made to Spencer's interpretation of his principle of economy, an interpretation which he himself partially corrects in later passages of his essay, is that economy is not always served by blunt and concrete expression. Spencer, in his own writings, has shown that the generalized Latin vocabulary is not only permissible, but at times is absolutely essential for a just statement of the ideas which he wished to express. If English were restricted to the native vocabulary — granting for a moment the possibility of the impossible — it would mean a return to the meager, simple scale of expression which characterized the literature of the pre-Renascence period, it would mean the renunciation of all the variety in phrasing, the melody and amplitude of cadence won for the language by the century of endeavor from Caxton to Shakspere. It would mean, in short, the reversal of those very qualities by virtue of which modern English style is what it is. The cultivation of the native, or so-called Saxon vocabulary, though it may serve as a corrective of the extravagant and high-flown diction often employed by untrained writers, has in itself no virtue, indeed is vicious if it leads to a neglect of the varied possibilities of English expression. No other test of diction or manner of phrasing can be found except truth to the thought and mood which inspires the expression. If the thought is simple and obvious and concrete, then the expression must be so; but a thought or a mood which is not simple or obvious or concrete can be forced into the mold of the simple style only at the expense of truth

and propriety of expression. The words "elegant" and "elegance" have grown somewhat old-fashioned, perhaps have been worn away by too constant use in a period when they were applied to anything commendable from a poem to a bird-cage. But the quality of elegance in style, of the nice choice of phrasing to distinguish a nicely distinguished mood, is one that the writer of English cannot afford to lose in a blind worship of a narrow and practical economy. If he does so, he simply errs at the other extreme from the advocate of art for art's sake in writing.

The question of the right proportion between art and nature in English style fairly raises what is after all the great, the fundamental question of English style — the question of the relation of the literary and written speech to the natural spoken language. Is literary English, or rather should literary English strive to be, something different from spoken English? That they are in fact different in some respects is inherent in the nature of the two. One is the breath of a moment, it is expression by means of lingual gesture forming sound; it is addressed only to the ear and it is always accompanied by helps to intelligibility in that we have the actual physical proximation of the individuals between whom the communication passes. In written or literary expression, however, the movements of the vocal organs are exchanged for a motion of the fingers and hands; it has to express itself in a system of permanent, visible symbols. The persons who are concerned in the communication are often hundreds of miles, hundreds of years, apart. There is no way of qualifying a statement by a smile or of enforcing it by the gleam of the eye. The written word stands not for what

it is, but for what the reader can make out of it. The prime question is, therefore, whether this difference in the method of expression entails a necessary and essential difference in the character of the expression. With the inexperienced writer we know that it does. When the farm hand lays down his prong and takes his pen in hand to write a few lines, he feels that he is entering on a strange and new activity which demands unusual and violent effort. He may be most eloquent in addressing his horses, but a few simple ideas to be expressed on paper throw him into an agony of uncertainty and terror. What the plowman suffers, every writer suffers in his degree. We all write at some remove from our own experience, we write with awkward and crippling stilts at the ends of our fingers. Not only to the literary novice is the act of writing unusual; with most of us it has never been reduced to unconscious habit, as spoken language has, and so it is hedged about by all sorts of hampering restraints.

These restraints, however, are adventitious, and as skill increases gradually disappear. In the end the practiced writer expresses himself as freely and as rapidly in writing as in speaking — sometimes, indeed, more freely and rapidly. But the mere technical inconveniences of literary expression being thus overcome, does there still remain a more deeply seated difference between spoken and literary style? An unprejudiced comparison of the two will show that there is no such fundamental difference, that "literary" expression need not come in response to a different set of mental activities from those which result in spoken expression, and furthermore, that the conscious "literary" intention usually results in

qualities of style which defeat the purpose of the intention.

The range of spoken expression must first be considered. All spoken English is not necessarily familiar English. The average circumstances of daily life do not, to be sure, require anything other than the relaxed forms of expression which we call colloquial; these forms are intelligible, and the general tone of daily conversation, its potential energy, does not encourage greater effort than is required for intelligibility. But spoken speech is not all on one plane of conversational utterance. As soon as a new element enters into colloquial communication, as soon as there is a slight increase of feeling, of formality, of earnestness, as soon as the audience is increased in size and diversity, the forms of the language immediately change. The speaker immediately chooses different words, different phrases, different sentence cadences, and all these changes are in the direction of what we call literary expression. It has often been observed that people in the height of passion or under the stress of great suffering express themselves with a power and poetic quality altogether lacking in their normal speech. These unexpected powers are an exemplification of the fact that literature and the literary quality exist in essence before there is any thought of putting pen to paper. Indeed it is only necessary to imagine the state of affairs before the art of writing existed to realize that pen and paper are external and artificial accompaniments of literary expression. Intelligent lovers of literature may be found who maintain that all the highest and best forms of literature, for example, the poetry of Homer, were composed before it was possible to record them in written symbols. And psychologists of today tell us that nine

out of every ten writers "hear" their writing before they put it down on paper — they hear by means of that inner ear which has come to be our second nature through the tens of thousands of generations during which we have grown accustomed to the spoken word.

The attempt, therefore, to find in literature a specific, artistic quality distinguishing it from all other language expression is artificial and untrue to the facts. Writing can be made a fine art, a cloistral refuge, only by depriving it of the warmth, the light, the sustaining earthly substance of common human experience which are necessities for all life in language. Literature is not indeed a superior form of expression because it differs from oral expression in the mechanical means by which it is recorded. The literary quality may be distinguished from the colloquial quality, but colloquialism is only one of the many forms of spoken expression. Rightly viewed, this conception of the nature of literary expression will not be regarded as lowering the dignity of literature and the literary style. It is no defect in literature that it is an echo, a reflection of actual life, rather it is its highest commendation. Literary expression becomes mean and sordid only when the general tone of life is mean and sordid, and when that stage of affairs is reached no amount of conscious literary artifice will save literature from its certain fate.

This notion of writing as a fine art and of the vulgarity of the actual world leads almost inevitably to the cultivation of highly manneristic styles. Within the seclusion of his cloistral refuge, the artist constructs a different, and, as he conceives, a better world than that by which he is surrounded. And as he has nothing to restrain him

except his own ideals, it is natural that he should go as far in the work of reconstruction as he feels inclined. To him the world of nature is an unfortunate and accidental assemblage of raw materials. The riper world he constructs is made by a process of selection and rejection, by the heightening of a quality here and the lowering of another there, until the artist produces a world such as the world of nature would have been if he had had the creating of it. One hesitates to say whether this notion is the more amusing for its colossal impudence or for its childish innocence. The world maker, playing with his highly refined little world, is like a boy playing with his miniature soldiers and animals. The child may be forgiven for preferring his toys to realities, but not the man for setting the little world of his fancy above the much greater world of nature. Writing as fine art and as an escape from reality has a place only in the world of the fancy. Writing as an expression of common human experience realizes its possibilities only when it becomes a part of the great world of nature.

But these criticisms of the theories of Flaubert and Pater, bluntly phrased as they have been, though they have a certain justification from the side of common sense, do not, nevertheless, dispose of the whole matter of writing as a fine art. The main weakness of the theories of Flaubert and Pater is that they draw into the discussion what is after all an irrelevant comparison. Neither Pater nor anyone else could answer the question whether the world of nature or the world of art is the finer and better world. As well ask whether a rose is finer than a sunset. The world of nature and the world of art are two different worlds, and the values of the one are not to be

determined by the values of the other. In spite of the old rule that art should follow nature, the world of art is really very little dependent on the world of nature, though being less immediately self-justifying and weaker, it often assumes the disguises of the world of nature as a protective coloring. But revolutionary artists are continually throwing off the restraints of the world of nature and asserting their right to be true only to themselves and their own world.

The primal difference between the world of art and the world of nature is that the artist controls his own world as no one ever can control the world of nature. The artist is a true creator. The world of nature belongs to all mankind, is accepted and interpreted with all the diversity of response of mankind. But the artist makes his world exactly as he wants it. And since it is his own world, subject to his determinations, manifestly the language in which it is expressed bears a different relation to it from that of the general language of mankind as the latter is used to express the infinite interrelations of men in their common possession of the world of nature. The conscientious artist presumably strives always to create truthfully to his own purpose and presumably also knows when he has attained his end. What he creates must therefore have unity, must be the thing itself. If it is not a unique thing, the artist has fumbled, has failed in clearness of vision, has not been a genuine creator but a hit or miss experimentalist. But if the artist's creation is unique, if it is something which he has brought into existence in his world of art and given a being of its own, then the artist cannot escape the compulsion of finding the unique word for his creation. He must find the word

which satisfies his sense of harmony between his experience and its expression, and since the artist has only himself to consider, this will be a word free of all the uncertainties and variabilities of words, of all the innumerable compromises in the use of words, as they are attached to the experiences of the world of nature in which all men have an equal and often conflicting share.

Yet the creating artist might very well object to any hard and fast division, such as has just been made, between the world of nature and the world of art. For after all, what is the world of nature? Is it only the world of the tangible and the visible, of those things which may be or have been matters of common experience? This is indeed the world which is most susceptible of organization and classification, the world in which most persons feel themselves securely at home. But the artist is certainly within his rights when he maintains that his world is just as natural, just as normal a part of his human experience as any other world. He sails through uncharted seas, he is a voyager and discoverer, and very often when he returns from his voyages he brings back reports of things which then become parts of the world of nature, of the world of common experience. The artist and the scientist are near akin. When the scientist makes a discovery, he must find fresh words to designate that which hitherto has not been matter of knowledge. The artist also makes fresh discoveries and feels the same compulsion to extend the bounds of language in order to make what he has found clearly intelligible to himself and others. Writing as a fine art is concerned not with matters of ancient and familiar human experience, nor again with matters beyond common human experience. The artist's task is that of

bringing into human experience things that have not been known before and of finding the proper language in which to set them forth. It is through him that the world of human experience grows. He is not merely a blind spokesman for the expression of diffused social impulses. Society acquires nothing which is not created first in the active minds of individual members of society. And it is here that writing as a fine art finds its just place in the all-comprehending notion of the world of nature. It is a place of high honor, not because the artist exists in a supernatural and abnormal world, but because the artist reveals more fully than men had hitherto realized the possibilities of the natural and normal. Rightly conceived, therefore, writing as a fine art is not a cloistral refuge for the world-wearied few. Doubtless it will always remain an activity of the few, but of a select body of immensely energetic spirits whose endeavor is to enlarge the world of common human experience, not to escape from it. Every practitioner of the art of letters, it must be acknowledged, is not an artist in the sense in which the word is here used. The artist and the scientist are spiritual brothers, and so also the artist and the poet. The artist is one in the small group of those who extend the limits of man's spiritual existence, one therefore who at all hazards must make language the faithful echo of his own being.

XXX

THE FUTURE OF ENGLISH

Shakspere and the English Bible are always worked very hard whenever the future of the English language comes up for discussion. These two classics, so the argument runs, are an ever-flowing fountain of English undefiled, and by a continual return to this well-head, English in the future will preserve that vigor and purity which the language in its first dignity derived from Shakspere and the Bible. Yet just how this preservative power is to be exercised does not appear self-evidently. Shakspere and the Bible cannot exert a control over the future of English merely by being. Unless Shakspere and the Bible come to life again in the minds of each new generation, they will be as dead and ineffective as any other books buried between the boards of their unopened covers. It does not appear that Shakspere and the English Bible are the daily and nightly companions of the youth of the present in whose speech the English language necessarily takes its living incarnation. To invoke the mere names of Shakspere and the English Bible is useless. Indeed it cannot be denied that much of the reverence for Shakspere and the Bible is nothing more than lip service. Moreover, this faith in the saving power of these two great classics, or in any other combination of classics, rests upon the dubious foundation of the belief that the future of the language is to be assured simply by maintaining the heritage of the past. The duty of this, and of all succeeding

generations, according to this belief, is not to discover and realize new possibilities in the language, but to codify and preserve what has already been done. If this is to be the future of the English language, the task of the prophet is relatively easy and his foreshadowings will be fairly safe. But it is not a future to stir the imagination, nor is it, one may reasonably hope, a future which will satisfy the aspirations of the coming generations.

Another way of approach to the consideration of the future of English is often made by the way of statistics. It is pointed out that the English language is now spoken by more civilized people than any other language in the world, and that by natural increase in numbers, the preponderance of English speaking peoples over others in time will become greater and greater. Unexpressed but often apparently implicit in this argument is the conviction that ultimately English by sheer weight of numbers will become the sole and universal civilized language of the world. And of course, since it is part of the white man's burden to civilize the uncivilized, so in the end the uncivilized will also speak English and the rule of English thus become absolute. As corollary to these statistical arguments, it is added that so long as the English people remain courageous, energetic, and true to themselves, so long their language will continue as it has been, the most admirable vehicle of expression the human mind has brought into existence.

Now no one doubts that in the future, as in the past, the English language will follow the flag. A safe and sane prophecy would be that the future of English will depend upon and reflect the future of the English speaking peoples. Wherever English culture, commerce, and cannon go, the

English language will follow, and so long as the English people are sound at heart, so long as the race remains virile and aggressive, as the patriots tell us, so long the English language will thrive and prosper. This is orthodox doctrine, sound enough but platitudinous. No one doubts that a people's language will always be an indication of its vigor and of its state of cultivation. But these reflections on English as an echo of general social and cultural conditions are of little interest to the prophet who seeks to look forward to what may be the developments of the speech regarded not as a handmaiden of business, commerce, and society, but as a creative intellectual activity with its own nature and possibilities. Let the political and social historian prophesy as to the future of the English people, and leave to the student of language for a moment the consideration of the question what may conceivably happen in the generations to come to English speech regarded as a language under the intelligent control of the people who use it.

Although the ancestry of English must be expressed in terms of geological ages, if one looks back to its genuinely primitive origins, nevertheless all this vast antiquity helps but little in establishing points along which one might extend a line projecting into the future. For though English speech, like every other language, in its elemental origins must be carried back to the crudest beginnings of the human evolutionary process, as a language fitted to the uses of the modern world, it is a thing almost of yesterday. The English language of the future, it seems quite certain, will be more and more momentously the language of literary and other more or less formal conventions. Not that the English of familiar and unso-

phisticated colloquial intercourse is likely to die out. Intimate and relaxed social relations will always require an easy and animated idiom of their own. But this kind of English may be left to take care of itself, as it has to be in any case, for there is no probability that any directive control will ever be acquired by official conservers over the movements of the current popular speech. It seems impossible to believe, however, that the movement extending the knowledge of formal English to all members of the social body, which has been so characteristic of the whole modern period, can be checked before the ideal of a completely literatized democracy is much more fully realized than it is at present. When one thinks reflectively of English speech today, one thinks first of all of those aspects of it which are in greater or less degree manipulated and under conscious direction. This indicates, of course, the primal difference between a natural and a cultivated language. A natural language is very slightly under conscious direction. It changes and grows not of its own free will but nevertheless under impulses which the users of it seldom or never reduce to any kind of formal expression. Unless some unforeseen catastrophe should take place, the English language of the future will be more and more a cultivated language, and the possibilities in this direction are the ones that offer the most interesting field for guessing.

The dominant attitude towards English during the whole modern period, from Chaucer to the present day, has been an elevating and classicizing attitude. Sometimes this took the form of enriching the language, as in the time of the Elizabethans, by making it more dignified and more variously expressive through the aid of foreign

borrowings. Not only words were borrowed in this way, but English structure and syntax were adapted to classical models in this endeavor to make the language more illustrious. After the enrichers had done their work, the grammarians, lexicographers, and rhetoricians of the eighteenth century busied themselves with purifying and still further elevating the language, not now by exuberant expansion, but by giving the uses of it recognized and approved values. Having been made important, the language was next made correct. Of these two tendencies the first seems almost to have exhausted itself. Apparently we are now satisfied with the resources of English as it is and we borrow foreign words only under the stress of necessity, not from any desire to improve the language as a whole. But the regularizing and purifying tendency is as strong as ever. We look upon our language as a precious heritage, and though we do not cherish it with quite the same zeal that we devote to the conservation of such stocks and bonds and landed estates as we may possess, we probably expend as much energy on keeping the language in order as any past generation has done.

It will be observed that all these improving, regularizing and classicizing efforts result from the desire to impose some kind of systematic control upon the language. Being his own possession, his own precious heritage, language is made the creature of man's will. It is his own child, and he assumes the privilege of telling his child how it shall grow and not grow. Perhaps no one would maintain that the result so far has been altogether successful. The experiment of bringing up a child is always exposed to dangers of mishap and disappointment. It may be worth while reflecting, however, what the result will be if

in the future the English language is really brought under the control of the intelligence. What will happen if man learns how to manipulate and arrange this human invention of language in order to make it respond to his own judgments and inclinations? And after he has attained this end, towards which he has already made a beginning, will the thinker of the future take a step further and try to persuade us that the real achievement in language is not to subdue it to the control of the organizing intelligence but to free it of such control? And if this final barrier to linguistic freedom is removed what will then be the prospects of development in the English language?

Painfully little has been accomplished so far in the way of systematic and rational control of the language. It would seem that well-informed and sensible persons should be able to make quickly effective any reasonable proposals for the welfare of the language. In fact achievements of this kind have been mostly negative, consisting of prescriptions against reprehended practices, and rarely have they moved in the direction of making available new possibilities. If the practical and rational control of the language becomes greater, however, certain obvious improvements can be expected, especially of a kind that will make the language more tidy. So simple a matter as English spelling, for example, an aspect of language that certainly ought to come under the direction of the intelligence if any part of it can be brought under such control, has been permitted to remain in a shameful disorder. One does not need to be an ardent advocate of reform to realize the advisability of doing something for English spelling. On the whole reasonable opinion even now would be pretty well agreed as to what ought to be done,

the only necessary guides being common sense and practical utility. That so little has been accomplished by the efforts that have been made is no proof that the efforts themselves were foolish, but merely an indication that common sense and practical usefulness in the control of the language still remain ideals for the future.

But spelling would be only a beginning of the general house-cleaning for which our precious heritage of English speech as we know it today provides a profitable opportunity. The language is burdened with quantities of useless lumber, which from the point of view of common sense and reason might just as well be burned on the rubbish heap. The grammatical system of English is full of anomalies and freaks that are preserved merely because we have them, not because they carry any value in themselves. Why should we permit an exceptional plural *feet* or *teeth* when we possess a perfectly good regular way of making plurals by adding *s?* And why should verbs like *write* have two past forms, *wrote* and *written*, when most verbs of the language get along quite satisfactorily with only one? The work of regularizing and systematizing the language has been well begun, but it has been left unfinished. Most of the work, to be sure, was not done under the direction of the intelligence, but in those popular stages of transition in the language from Old to Middle English and from Middle to Modern English when people apparently used language with a simple directness in adapting means to an end which speakers on the sophisticated levels of society often feel to be rather crude. In good society it is not proper form to be too bluntly efficient. Yet in the end there must be a certain degree of efficiency, or all social communication would be smoth-

ered under the weight of burdensome form and tradition. The common sense argument for the further simplification of the English grammatical system would be that things which are in themselves indifferent, such as the elementary ways of indicating formally the several grammatical functions, according to the canons of the best manners should not be the bearers of special distinctions, simple things being at their best when most simply treated. If one asks whether there is any prospect that English speaking people in the future will complete intelligently the simplifications which earlier generations began and almost completed instinctively, a hopeful answer seems not unreasonable. Extraordinary changes have taken place in other aspects of social custom within the past three hundred years, and though language seems to be one of the last expressions of social custom to be subjected to conscious reflection, it is nevertheless as susceptible of examination and intelligent criticism as any other.

Having simplified spelling and grammar, the intelligent reformer of the future will probably next turn to idiom. Regarded as examples of common sense or logic, it is absurd that we should speak of falling in love, or of falling head over heels — how else would one fall? — or of falling to when we begin to eat. There are numerous combinations of this word "fall," as of many others, which defy logic. The intelligent reformer of language would have no difficulty in showing that the work done by these locutions could be done much more simply by other phrases constructed of materials susceptible of analysis in accordance with the customary logical uses of the language. The remodeled phrases would be clearer, because expression which is analytically intelligible is clearer and more

definite in meaning than that which has to be taken merely in the lump.

The illustrations cited from spelling, inflection, and idiom are fair samples of what may be the consequences of applying common sense and reason to the future development of the English language. But if this is what we are in for, doubtless many will say, save us from common sense and reason. It cannot be denied that most of the reasonable improvements that might be made in English have to do with the merest trivialities of the language. Reformed spelling affects only a very simple mechanical aspect of the language, and a more completely regularized grammar than the one now in use would not change the language one way or the other so far as its really significant powers of expression are concerned. And to debate over the relative merits of falling head over heels and falling heels over head does indeed seem an exercise suited only to the feeble minded. Nevertheless a sequence of improvements of this kind might very well lead in the end to a very considerable modification of English as we know it, and certainly it would be indicative of a very different attitude of mind towards the language from that which now prevails. For one may very well acknowledge that the improvements which may be made in the language under the direction of reason and common sense are trivialities without at the same time denying that they would be genuine improvements and deserving of as much attention as would be necessary to make them effective. Every so often the language is in need of a house-cleaning, say once for each generation. Useless furniture accumulates in languages as well as in houses, and to talk about a precious heritage, whether of broken-backed chairs or of

broken-down forms of language is precious nonsense. The relics of the past are often preserved indiscriminately because one does not take the trouble to look at them intelligently enough to discover which are worth saving and which are not. This business of cleaning house is not the most exalted occupation one may engage in, but it often adds greatly to ease and comfort.

The danger is, of course, that the reformer may acquire a passion for systematization and regularization which will lead him to over-estimate the value of his work and to carry it further than is necessary. Language is mechanical in many of its aspects, and in things mechanical a high degree of neatness and precision is desirable. But if language is a mechanism, it is one the value and nature of which should be judged by the work the mechanism has to perform. A simplified machinery will do very well for the expression of a simplified content. English might very easily be reformed into a regularized system which would fit it to serve as well as Esperanto, Ido, or any other artificial language for the highly generalized and impersonal uses of international communication. But a language of this kind could be achieved only by sacrificing the greater possibilities of the language in favor of the less. Progress and improvement in language have been defined by Professor Jespersen as consisting in the economical adaptation of means to an end. That is the best language, according to this definition, which attains its end with the least expenditure of effort. Wasted effort perhaps cannot be very convincingly defended, and of course Jespersen realizes that the ends one may endeavor to attain in the expressive use of language are not all of the same kind. But though he realizes this, it is also plain to

see that the kinds of expression that appeal most to Jespersen are those which take a very simple, direct, and regular form, that is, those which are firmly under the control of the reason and the intelligence. This would be almost inevitably the tendency of the system builders. And a system once constructed not only seems admirable but very soon is felt to be sacred. A firmly and definitely formulated system would soon begin to impose itself on all the uses of the language, as indeed our system already does, and very soon we should find ourselves expressing only those things which the system easily permitted. This would probably cause our expression to seem clearer, but only because we attempted to express that which could be made immediately and universally clear. The French have a saying that writing which is not clear is not French, but like most epigrams this is only partly true even of so logical a language as French. It expresses the ideal, however, of those who think language should be always under the control of the intelligence. But imagine the precise, opinionated, puritanical, inflexible, and monotonous world we should have to live in if our actions were all compelled to submit to the control of the intelligence! Order is a good thing, but man cannot live by order alone. As orderly system grew, the language would gain in exactness, but, like French, at the same time it would lose in flexibility. The conclusion we come to is, therefore, that completer organization and systematization, although they seem to be the next steps in the further development of English, and though they need to be carried still further than they have yet been carried, are nevertheless not adequate as a statement of the goal and end towards which the language should move.

Poets and other literary artists have always realized that the traditional organization of the language is something that concerns them only superficially. They have accepted and utilized it as a practical convenience whenever expediency required, for even poets and artists must in some degree acknowledge the demands of intelligibility. But intelligibility in language regarded as a genuinely creative activity is of a very different order from intelligibility in language which is addressed to the common understanding in terms of normalized experience. It is different not merely because the poet's or the prose artist's thought may be more difficult, more subtle, or more ample, but because it implies a different attitude towards the whole process of language. Poets are unsocial beings, always unwilling to conform to society. They are quite content, however, to have society conform to them, though when the whole social body becomes flexible and adaptable enough to follow the poet through his endless metamorphoses the spirit of poetry will have permeated it pretty thoroughly. So also in language, the traditional regularities represent the conformities which society makes on the basis of those original and individual creative acts which must have preceded them and which stood closer to the source of all expressive life in language. The true artist in language is concerned not with these conformities, but with the primitive expressive materials of language from which the system builders construct their rules and prescriptions.

The great question is, to be sure, whether there is to be any place for the artist in the English language of the future, or whether English is to be merely a practical convenience for the expression of normalized thoughts

and feelings, common to all the members of the social body. If the latter, the system builder, with his rule of reason, has a clear field. But if English is to be a continually progressive creation, then it must escape from the tyranny of the reason and must regain some of the freedom of impulse and emotion which must have been present in the primitive creative origins of language. Consider for a moment how the tyranny of rule now inhibits variation in language. In vocabulary, for example, the modern writer is pretty rigorously restricted to the words in the dictionary. Perhaps there are enough words in the dictionary to satisfy any reasonable demand, but the point is that the dictionary is held over the writer as a law beyond which he may not go. Yet any active-minded writer, if he allowed his fancy to play freely with something of the delight and originality of children in the use of language, could easily devise words or word-combinations that would have new and genuinely expressive values. This has been done now and then experimentally and humorously, by Lewis Carroll and many others. But only rarely, and only quite recently, have a few radical spirits attempted innovations of this sort in what may be called serious literary writing. For example: "he watched through peacocktwittering lashes the southing sun," "he smellsipped the cordial juice"; "they creepycrawl"; "eagerquietly"; "shybrightly"; "suddenly happied"; "the treeshade of sunnywinking leaves"; "jet beads . . . inkshining in the sun"; "he seehears lipspeech"; "they fingerponder nightly each his variorum edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*"; and so with dozens more throughout the many pages of Joyce's *Ulysses*. But these are childish frivolities, it may be objected, and so they quite surely are from the traditional

point of view. Any adventurer who attempts the exploit of restoring to English the gay independence of its primitive creative powers must be prepared to face the charge of being childish. He should be prepared also for the possibility that his innovations will be laughed completely out of existence, for it cannot be denied that Importance and Propriety are two very tough opponents. But perhaps in the future, to take a hopeful view of the matter, even the intelligence may be so far liberated that it may be brought to the assistance of the poets in this matter of word creation. On the basis of the roots already in existence in the language, the philologist could create hundreds of new word-forms which might be extremely useful to the artists in language. And when it comes to the creation of entirely new words from the sounds of the human voice, the possibilities are unlimited. The Russian writer Kruchenikh has maintained that the meaningless syllables *dir*, *bul*, *tschil*, of his own invention, contain more poetry than all of Pushkin. Perhaps they do not — parents are always inclined to see invisible beauties in their children. But there seems no reason in the nature of things why the abundant sounds of speech should not again be utilized for the creation of entirely original combinations as they were in the infancy of human speech. If poets and artists and others who are willing to take a fresh start but point the way, imitators will readily follow. It remains, therefore, a fair question whether English has not lost valuable resources in flexibility, in freshness, even in economy of expression by sticking too closely to the approved models in word-formation. The logician will naturally object to "peacocktwittering lashes," but anybody with a child's readiness to comprehend knows what the words mean,

though the effort of saying what they mean in the roundabout formal style would be so laborious as to make it not worth saying. Perhaps the stylist of the future will regain some of these lost liberties and be able to insist that his words shall not be judged by the uses which others have made of the same words, but by his own uses, the only compulsion he will recognize being that of using words in such a way as to give them genuinely expressive values.

The English sentence likewise has tended to take on an ironclad structure which is imposing as a logical achievement but which corresponds only remotely to the simple natural processes of the mind. We do not think always — or often — in perfect sentences, but by the traditions of literary style, we are compelled to write in them. We have already mentioned John Stuart Mill's statement that every sentence is a lesson in logic. But perhaps the English mind of the future will weary of these unremitting lessons in logic and seek to take a few lessons in nature. The English sentence has gained a great deal in simplicity in the past three hundred years. A Miltonic or Johnsonian period is possible now only as a rhetorical exercise. But the short sentence, the *style coupé*, of modern writers, is only one step nearer to nature. As a universal prescription it is just as unreal as the more labored constructions of the older writers. The strictly regulated structure of the English sentence has undoubtedly encouraged a kind of exactness in expression, but again sometimes at the expense of truth, and very often with a loss of variety in rhythm. The demand of the reformer of the future of course will not be for a crude, chaotic, unsyntactical sentence. Horrible examples of

this kind of writing abound sufficiently at present. The inexpert writer who now blindly tries to follow nature in constructing his sentences, who jumbles his pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, verbs, and subjects, only too often produces something which is neither lovely nor intelligible. His main difficulty ordinarily lies, however, in an imperfect command of the inflexible mechanical form which tradition imposes upon his mind, not in any native incapacity of mind. What the reformer of the future may seek is a more liberal interpretation of syntax. Perhaps he will not demand that every sentence shall have a subject and a predicate, and that it shall move along with flowing rhythm through a definite beginning, middle, and end. He will strive for intelligibility, not by an appeal to rhetorical structure, but by the more simple appeal to correspondence between mental content and formal expression. The art of writing will probably not be made any easier thereby. In fact, the easiest way to write is to acquire a set of forms and to stick to them. The classical style of the eighteenth century is the easiest of all styles to acquire because the models for it were so clearly and so acceptably elaborated. But truth to the actual content of the mind is the hardest kind to attain, demanding as it does that direct knowledge of oneself which few writers ever have the courage to seek.

Structure in the larger sense, in the sequence of statements in a continuity of expression, will gain in flexibility and variety in the same way as the sentence by a loosening of the bonds of rigid logical arrangement which now condition it. The attempt to make structure correspond to the stream of consciousness is a movement in this direction. A strict logical arrangement of statements is possible only

by exerting an extraordinarily high-handed control over the real contents of the mind. This straitjacketing of the processes of thinking is something more than the artist's selection of materials, for almost always the strictly coherent logical structure is attainable only by excluding many details which, from the point of view of mental reality, are relevant to the expression. One can imagine a youth of a hundred years hence remarking casually how stiff and mechanical English style was in the first half of the twentieth century, how little shading, how little agility in transitions it possessed. A new psychology will undoubtedly have its reflection in a new arrangement of language forms, and the coming generations, like our own, must be permitted to enjoy their superiorities.

Experiments in the use of free sentence structures, sequences, and rhythms are not uncommon in our day, though they have not yet been carried very far. They appear, however, only in the writings of persons who look upon themselves and who are content to be looked upon as experimentalists. They are encumbered also by certain extravagances of experiment which are natural enough in the beginnings of a movement, but which really have little to do with English considered as a medium of linguistic expression. Thus passages have been written which not only lack conventional syntactical structure but which dispense also with capitals and all marks of of punctuation. Now it is true that neither capitals, commas, semicolons, or periods are present in the mind at the very moment of the expressive use of language. They are put in afterwards when the content of the mind is transferred to paper. It is true also that they are rhetorical or mechanical devices not essential to intelligibility.

But it is none the less true that the written or printed forms of letters are likewise not present in the mind as an essential part of the process of thinking. Yet if language is to be given a visual form, it cannot very well get along without visible symbols. The truth is that literary language can never be a nakedly faithful picture of the content of the mind. It must always be a translation into a different medium, and a consideration which the writer must always keep in mind is that of using symbols that interfere as little as possible with the content of the mind. Capitalization and punctuation are conventional symbols like the letters of the alphabet, and if they are incumbrances to the writer, he must look upon them, especially upon punctuation, as among the essential limitations of the endeavor to bring his thought into existence in the external world.

Another experimental extravagance is that of attempting to replace significant structure in language by a mere pattern of words, by a kind of super-rational use of language. The argument here is that a mere pattern of words, if it is pleasing, justifies itself apart from any considerations of correspondence with thinking. But this again seems like experimentalism gone mad. A mere pattern of words may be pleasing, or a mere pattern of any sounds, but to call this pattern language gives to this word a meaning contradictory to the nature of language. A pleasing pattern of sounds may be music, and as such it may justify itself, and of course as one element in writing, pattern plays an important part. But language implies something more than music. Music can suggest, but it cannot tell, it can rouse emotions, but it cannot specify or give definite meanings, either intellectual or pictorial. It seems possible to use the materials of

language for musical purposes in a rudimentary way, though obviously there are better ways of producing music than through language. But it seems impossible to make music do the work of language. The most descriptive program music that has ever been composed is only vaguely descriptive. This difference between the art of music and the art of language seems to be fundamental, and though at the edges the two arts may be confused, when they realize with any completeness their possibilities, each makes its separate appeal to the understanding.

Another experiment in structure, not unlike that of the pattern, has been exhibited most fully in the writings of Gertrude Stein. In this style, sentence forms, more or less correctly made according to the traditional idiom, are repeated again and again with approximately the same words but with the words somewhat varied in arrangement to make different syntactical combinations. The purpose of this repetition is not to illustrate all the grammatical possibilities of language, nor to elaborate merely rhythmical variations, nor least of all to develop thought by successive logical steps, each very short, but each nevertheless moving the thought slightly forward. On the contrary, the purpose and effect seem to be to hold all thought in abeyance, to produce in the mind by this meaningless repetition a vacant state of expectancy which, like a blank surface, can be imprinted with a meaning at the precise moment when the writer is ready to drop the hint which shall convey a meaning. The greater part of the effort of this writing, like that of the maker of patterns, is to prevent thinking, to starve the reader, and then, when he is sufficiently famished, to stimulate him with

a small dose of significance. Undoubtedly this style is capable of producing a certain effect. The mental emptiness it produces makes one light-headed, prepared to see visions and dream dreams, and for this reason even a slight hint of meaning is eagerly grasped and interpreted as significant. Nevertheless the style seems not very promising as an experiment in new directions, for after all, like the artifices of the traditional literary style, it is founded upon rhetorical ingenuity. Repetition to the point of monotony is merely a mechanical device for securing suspense, and on the whole an uneconomical and tedious device. It corresponds to no normal habit of natural experience in language, for though hypnotic states may be fairly easily induced by the repetition of almost any words or phrases, such soporific devices seem more like juggling with language than accepting it frankly as it exists in normal experience. As has been well said, such tricks of style are very much as though one should be brought laboriously into a house through the chimney only to find afterwards that there was a door through which one might have entered more quickly and conveniently.

The builders of the style of the future are sure to go astray if they look too far beyond the bounds of common human experience. If they expend their energies upon the fashioning of new rhetorical machinery, they will be merely preparing work for some later reformer to undo again. Ingenuity is not required if one is willing to rest upon nature. The business of the prophet is really not so much to look into the future — which no one can ever do — but into the past, to see beneath the traditional obscurations which settle on the surface of things to the under-

lying simplicity. The hope for the English language of the future does not lie in the direction of greater ingenuity in the development of a new rhetoric at the expense of reality. That path has been tried again and again, and has been found to lead nowhere. It lies in the last place where the seekers after fine distinctions have been willing to look for it, in the frank acceptance of the workings of their own minds.

How long will it be before this renovation of English style is accomplished? Alas, we shall not live to see the day. We are still too much under the thumbs of our classic grammarians and rhetoricians who "churned the language into shape." Such things move slowly. Violent subversion of existing social orders may hasten matters, though here prophecy must be left to the political and social historians. But even without revolution, change is inevitable. Style cannot remain stationary, and the direction of growth seems clearly indicated. For nearly three hundred years we have been engaged in refining the language. We have been intent on consolidating our precious heritage. Three hundred years is not so very long, however, in the history of a language, nor will it prove to be so very large a part, we may hope, in the whole tale of English culture. The critic of the language three hundred years hence will presumably be able to register even greater changes than are now apparent when the language of our day is compared with the English of Shakspere and the King James version of the Bible.

How the changes of the future are to be brought about is of course hidden from us, but the prophet is not prohibited from making what seems to him a plausible guess. Throughout the whole of the modern period of English,

directive control of the language has been exerted mainly over the language of mature cultivated speakers and writers. In the Renascence the enrichers were conscious experimentalists, but not experimenters in the basic and primitive processes of language. Their task, as they conceived it, was to take English, already a fully developed and on the whole satisfactory medium of expression, and make it better and more illustrious through the addition of graces and charms pleasing to the æsthetic sense of the accomplished artist in language. Likewise the grammarians and rhetoricians of the eighteenth century took as their point of departure the established and formal literary language. Their endeavor was to make English fit for the uses of scholars and gentlemen. The next great change of attitude towards English came as a part of the Romantic reversal at the end of the eighteenth and in the early nineteenth centuries. Return to nature, to the simple and natural was then the cry. But the return to nature was to be made by confirmed literary practitioners, Thomsons, Wordsworths, Coleridges, and others, persons burdened with such a weight of ancient tradition and habit that for them the return to any deep-seated and genuine natural simplicity was an impossibility. Reforms of established literary modes must always be impeded and imperfect. Is it conceivable that the reforms of the future will attempt to start closer to the root of the matter? And where is the root of the matter to be found except in the experiences of children? The children of today are still slaves chained to the traditional system of the language, striving to make even more fine the fine gold of our precious heritage of English speech. But suppose the children of this generation and of the next

were permitted to cultivate expressiveness instead of fineness of speech, were praised and promoted for doing something interesting, not for doing something correct and proper. If this should happen, as indeed it is already beginning to happen, the English language and literature would undergo such a renascence as they have never known. And perhaps this English of the future would be something not unworthy to be placed beside the English of the Bible and of Shakspere.

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INDEX

See also the alphabetical Reading Lists for authors and titles

abbott, 328
abstract, 166
Accent, variability of, 165
Adams, John, 98
adder, 362
Adjectives, strong and weak, 287
adscititious, 459
Adverbial objective, 134
Adverbs in *-ly*, 119
African languages, 397
against, 362
agape, 85
Aim in writing, 438
ain't, 180
Alfred, 219, 255, 399
Algonquin languages, 397
all, 414
Alphabet, letters of, 352
also, 88
alto, 50
alumni, 117
American Indians, 397
amphora, 213
ampulla, 213
Analogy, 115 ff.
Analysis, 266
Angles, 399
anyhow, 87, 113
anyway, 87, 113
appendicitis, 336
apple, 414
apron, 362
argon, 334
Arnold, M., 420, 498
Art and nature in style, 523
Art for art's sake, 443
Article, 288
ash, 414
ask, 414
asked, 364
Athapascan languages, 397
atheling, 326
atoms, 90
anger, 362
Austen, Jane, 203
Austin, Alfred, 507
Authority, 158 ff.
automobile, 333, 466
auto-suggestion, 336
aviator, 466
ax, 414

bacillus, 335
Background of English, 218
bake, 414
bamboo, 335
ban, 74
banana, 335
bare, 414
bath, 414
bean, 414
bed, 414
Bede, 252
bee, 414
Beethoven, 443
Beowulf, 463
Best authors, 167
Best speakers and writers, 169
Bible, influence of on language, 401, 531
bicycle, 333
bid, 414
bide, 414
Biglow Papers, 18
Big words, 462 ff.
Bilingualism, 40–41
bi-monthly, 919

bind, 414
bit, 141
board, 332
bonne, 47, 53
bonus, 50, 90
book, 416
Boston pronunciation, 381
brick, 141
bridal, 199
brillo, 335
Brownell, W. C., 428
Browning, Mrs., 506
Browning, R., 208, 231, 363, 499, 509
Bryant, W. C., 510
buffet, 49
Buffon, 424
bunch, 475
bungalow, 335
Bunyan, 422
Burns, 18
butter, 328
buxom, 135
Byron, 492, 505

cablegram, 199
cadet, 49
calories, 336
candle, 328
Canute, 329
care, 410
Carlyle, 465, 481
Carroll, Lewis, 543
Case, 290
caviare, 335
Caxton, 461
Celts, borrowings from, 327
centenary, 214
certain, 376
chair, 332
charity, 84
Chaucer, 78, 156, 223, 230, 257, 460, 464, 504
chauffeur, 127, 333
cheese, 328
cherubim, 117
chicle, 335
chilli, 335
China, literary language of, 375
chivalry, 332
chocolate, 335
Christmas, 209
church, 328
circumstances, 139
clammy, 497
Class dialects, 19
Classicizing tendencies in English, 534
clerk, 378
clinic, 336
Cnut, 255
coastal, 198
cocoa, 335
codex, 411
coffee, 335
Coleridge, 151, 455
Color words, 478
combine, 166
Commerce, vocabulary of, 335
Comparative Grammar, 235, 388
complete, 154
contemplate, 334
Contractions, 57
convalescence, 336
Correctness, 106 ff.
countless, 73
Cowper, 338
Cratylus, 132
Creation of language, 30 ff.
cup, 328, 332
curtain, 376
Custom, 169
Cynewulf, 460

Danes in England, 329
data, 50, 90
dazzle, 497
deaf, 357
dear, 414
death, 414
dedicate, 334
deep, 414
deer, 414
defect, 166

Defects of speech, 385
defiant, 129
defile, 166
déjeuner, 47, 53
delight, 140
demi tasse, 47
Demons, 191
Derivation of languages, 34 ff.
Descriptive Grammar, 235
Design in language, 77 ff.
detail, 166
devise, 73
dew, 414
diagnosis, 336
Dialect, meaning of term, 17 ff.
Dickens, Charles, 194
Dictionaries, uses of, 163
differential, 90
Differentiation in languages, 396
dignity, 332
dive, 87
Diversity in English, 16–17
Dogmatism, justification of, in language, 166
don't, 180
doom, 414
Double negative, 156
dough, 316
draw, 414
Drift in language, 77 ff.
drink, 416
drown, 362
duff, 316

Ease of utterance, 363
eat, 416
Echo in language, 82
éclat, 47
Economy of effort, 364
educate, 334
education, 138
Education as a test, 19
eft, 73
eke, 144
electron, 334
emit an odor, 69
endorse, 140
English as a generic term, 15
enough, 361
environment, 336
Esperanto, 31
Etymology, 130 ff.
eugenics, 336
Euphuism, 517
eve, 73
ex cathedra, 213
Experience and analysis, 4–5
Expletives, 64
exsiliency, 339

fain, 73
Faithful blind, 162
familiar, 466
Families of languages, 387
farrow, 410
father, 315
fatiscence, 339
favaginous, 339
favillous, 339
Feeling for mother tongue, 51
feign, 316
feint, 316
fermillac, 335
fiction, 316
Fielding, Henry, 203, 436
figment, 316
fingere, 316
finished, 154
Flaubert, 425
flock, 474
Foreigners' English, 40
Foreign words anglicized, 49
fork, 328
Formal Colloquial English, 57 ff.
Forms of address, 302
Forms of affirmation and negation, 65
fountain, 376
Free verse, 489
French clarity, 541
French influence on English, 330
full, 154
Full inflections, 273

garage, 50, 107, 333
Gascoigne, 500
Gender, 279 ff., 300
Genealogy of languages, 393
genera, 280
General Colloquial, 56 ff.
Genius of the language, 92
germ, 335
Germanic languages, characteristics of, 413 ff.
get, 357
glad, 478
glamor, 231
glue, 497
Goethe, 427, 465
Golden age of English, 29 ff.
Goodenough, 361
gossip, 86, 137, 145
Gothic, artificiality of, 36
gotten, 87
goulash, 335
gramarye, 231
Grammar, definition of, 228 ff.
gramophone, 334
Grant-Duff, 509
Gray's *Elegy*, 509
Greene, R., 174, 503

ha-ha, 322
Hamilton, W., 464
Hardy, Thomas, 422, 435
Harmonization in language, 83
Harold, 220
harvest, 408
Harvey, G., 462
head, 408
heigh-ho, 322
hen, 318
herd, 474
heredity, 336
hide, 410
hill, 408
hinterland, 47, 50, 53
Historical Grammar, 235
ho, 322
Hobbes, 441
Holmes, O. W., 369
Homogeneity in dialect, 24
Horace, 170
horizontal, 154
horrid, 140
hound, 416
house, 321
humanitarian, 135
humph, 322
hundred, 408
husband, 86
hussy, 137, 145
Hybrids, 200
hydrogen, 452

ichthyosaurus, 466
Idiom, definition of, 42 ff.
Ido, 31
immediate, 139
immissivity, 339
immune, 335
index, 50
Indians, languages of, 397, 404 ff.
Indo-European parent speech, unity of, 32–34, 389, 407 ff.
Infancy, speech of, 37
Inherent law in language, 110
Inkhorn terms, 334
Instinctive habit in speech, 6
Institute of English, 173
integer, 411
International Phonetic Association, 351; see also Reading Lists.
intrinsically, 459
island, 125

James, Henry, 112, 422, 435
Jefferson, Thomas, 98
Jespersen, O., 540
jest, 73
John Gilpin's Ride, 501
Johnson, Samuel, 48, 163, 193, 204, 359, 375, 464
Jonson, Ben, 174, 439, 462
Joyce, J., 543

Justice in language, 180
Jutes, 399

kangaroo, 335
Keats, 471, 498
Keswick, 379
kimono, 335
kindergarten, 50, 417
kine, 73
King, H. E. H., 507
Kipling, R., 159, 510
kitchen, 328
Knowledge of English, meaning of the phrase, 10–11
Kruchenikh, 544

lady, 86, 227, 316, 360
lamb, 416
lass, 73
Latin as source of Romanic languages, 35, influence on the English vocabulary, 333 ff.
Latin grammar, artificiality of, 36
Learned elements in English, 259
Leveled inflections, 273
Levels of speech, 55 ff.
Levison, 379
-lic, -lice, 123–124
lievtenant, 378
like, 180
likewise, 88
limosis, 339
limotherapia, 339
lip, 409
Literary English, 57 ff.
little, 476
livid, 135
Local dialects, 18
loch, 361
Logic, 147 ff.
Long words in English, 462 ff.
lord, 86, 227, 317, 360
Lost inflections, 273
lot, 365
Lounsbury, T. R., 167
love, 84
Lowell, J. R., 18, 507
Lowth, Bishop, 452, 500
lurid, 135
Lydgate, 461

macaroni, 335
Macaulay, 465
machine, 317
mammoth, 335
Marlowe, 174
matinée, 50
may, 317
Medicine, vocabulary of, 336
meerschaum, 417
Melody in speech, 495
mental complex, 336
Meredith, George, 112, 422, 435
mickle, 326
might and main, 317
Mill, J. S., 483, 545
Milton, 358, 485
mirage, 50
monk, 376
mood, 324
Morals of English, 171 ff.
More, Sir Thomas, 85
Morley, J., 422
mountain, 376
Murray, Alexander, 34
Murry, J. M., 424
Muscular sensation in words, 479
Music and language, 548

n, tendency to disappear as ending, 296
Nashe, T., 174, 462
Nature and nurture, 3 ff.
neck, 365
ne'er, 73
Negligible variation, 25
Negro English, 392
nephew, 410
newt, 362
New York Times, 173
nickname, 362
nocturnal, 197
nomad, 214

noxious, 197
Number, regularity in, 89 ff., formal expression of, 294, loss of in adjective and article, 298

Oaths, 64
oblivious, 142
occult, 166
o'er, 73
oleomargarine, 335
omniscient, 143
onus, 50
opera, 50
organ, 328

pacifist, 199
pact, 74
pajamas, 335
paprika, 335
parallelepiped, 214
pariah, 214
Passive verb with object, 44
Pater, Walter, 112, 425, 494, 515
Pattern in words, 548
Patterson, W., 490
Peele, 174
Pentecost, 16
perfect, 154
Periodic sentences, 494
perpendicular, 154
Perry, Bliss, 382
Perry, W., 359
perspiration, 69
phenomena, 117
Phonemes, 346
Phonetic alphabets, 349
phonograph, 334
Picts, 254
pish, 322
Plato, 30, 132
plum duff, 316
pneumonia, 336
Poetic diction, 458
Poetry, style of, 456
Political influences on English, 401
Polysyllabic humor, 468
Pope, A., 470
Popular English, 56 ff.
pork, 410
postal, 199
Postgate, Professor, 507
Prayer Book, 401
pre-, 200
precedence, 213
Prepositions at end, 153
pretzel, 417
priest, 328
Priestly caste, purism of, 214
primates, 214
primitive, 143
Prior, M., 503
Pronouns, inflections of, 299 ff.
Pronunciation, dictionaries as guides to, 164, correspondence with spelling, 376, of the stage, 384
Prose poetry, 488
provided, 87
providing, 87
Prudery, purism of, 214
pshaw, 322
Purism, 186 ff., of pedantry, 196, of literary tradition, 202, of literalism, 209, of the schoolroom, 211

Race and language, 390
racial, 199
Radicalism in language, 160
Raleigh, W., 426
Realistic diction, 473
rebate, 166
rebound, 166
recess, 166
recondite, 166
red, 478
referendum, 50
Reflecting and unreflecting uses of language, 11–12
reflex, 160
Reflexive pronouns, 303–304
relay, 166
remote, 73
Renascence, English vocabulary in, 333

reply, 73
respond, 73
return, 73
reverence, 332
Rhodes scholars, 82
Rhythm, basis of, 481
right, 352
rigid, 143
rigorous, 143
ring, 365
Robinson Crusoe, 337
Romanic languages, unity of, 34 ff., 412
Romans in Britain, 252, 328
Romantic style, 437
Root words, 319
Roscommon, 503
rough, 362
round, 154
Royce, J., 383
Runes, 353

s, vitality as ending, 296
sago, 335
sapolio, 335
sauerkraut, 417
Saxons, 399
Scandinavian elements in English, 329
Science, vocabulary of, 335
scimitar, 124
scissors, 125
sculptor, 50
scythe, 124
Shakspere, 47, 168, 173, 204, 207, 462, 498, 531
shampoo, 335
sheep, 314
Shelley, 478, 483
Sheridan, Thomas, 359
Sickness and health, analogy of, 6–7
Sidney, Sir Philip, 483
Sinclair, May, 509
situate, 334
Slang, 63, 434
Slovenly English, 60
small, 476
smell, 69
so, 211
soap, 416
somebody's else, 113
soprano, 50
sound, 362
Sounds, difficulty of recognition of, 341 ff., description of, 344, number of, 345, history of, 353, causes of change in, 360 ff., beauty in, 370
sozodont, 335
spaghetti, 335
Speech improvement, 190
speedometer, 199
Spelling reform, 352
Spencer, H., 521
Split infinitive, 151–152
square, 154
Stage English, 382, 384
stand in awe, 43
steed, 73
Stein, G., 549
Stendahl, 424
Stevenson, R. L., 419, 427
stigmata, 213
stink, 69
stool, 332
Structural change, causes of, 277 ff., 311
studio, 50
Style, levels of, 453, dangers of learned diction in, 458
such an one, 207
Supernatural language, belief in, 92
sweat, 69
Swift, J., 425, 467, 504
Synonyms, lack of in Anglo-Saxon, 324
Synthesis, 266

table, 332
tapioca, 335
tea, 335
telegram, 334
telegraph, 466
telephone, 334, 466
Temperamental conservatism, 159
ten, 410
Tennyson, 18, 203, 208, 404, 511

tergiversation, 459
Texts, reading of, 222
Thackeray, W. M., 502
these, 301
these kind, 113
thick, 416
think, 412
those, 301
thou, 302
three, 410
through, 352
tidal, 198
Timbre, 482
Tindale, William, 85
tiny, 477
Tone in speech, 497
Tone poems, 444
too, 88
tough, 361
Trade names, 334
tuberculosis, 336
typhoid, 336

Unitary rhythm, 485
Unity of English, 16
Usefulness in language, 176
Utility, 176

valor, 332
vanilla, 335
Verbs, inflections of, 305 ff.
victuals, 376
vim, 50
Visual sensations in words, 481
vitamins, 336
Vocabularies, size of, 337
vociferously, 197
Volapuk, 31
Vulgar English, 56 ff.
vulgar errors, 67
vulgar tongue, 67
Vulgate, 66

Walker, John, 359
waltz, 417
wash, 416
Washington, George, 98
Weak verbs, 413
Web and texture in style, 430
Webster, Noah, 34, 373
Wells, H. G., 208
Wells, W. H., 243
West, Rebecca, 383
whir, 497
whither, 73
Whitman, 160–161
whose, 211
wisdom, 360
wood, 498
Words, invention of, 313 ff.
Wordsworth, 203, 455
World English, 263
wright, 352
write, 352

yam, 335
yare, 326
ye, 302
yoke, 410

zeitgeist, 47, 50, 53